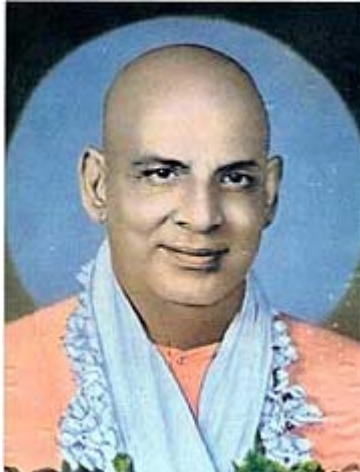


A CALL TO LIBERATION

By

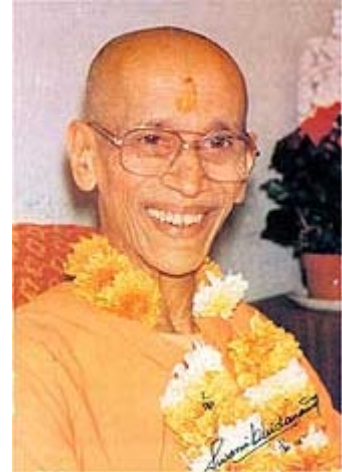
SRI SWAMI CHIDANANDA



**Sri Swami Sivananda
Founder of
The Divine Life Society**



**SERVE, LOVE, GIVE,
PURIFY, MEDITATE,
REALIZE
So Says
Sri Swami Sivananda**



Sri Swami Chidananda

“...it is a tradition of centuries, of millenia—someone being prepared to do anything, give anything, pay any price for the attainment of the Highest.”

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

In each successive generation for innumerable centuries the saints and sages of India have issued forth the call: “*uttishthata jagrata prapya varan nibodhata* (Arise, awake, having reached the wise become enlightened).” In the twentieth century this timeless call was also echoed by His Holiness Sri Swami Sivananda, the saintly founder of the Divine Life Society, and has been continued by the revered Swami Chidananda who succeeded him in 1963 as president of the Society.

This powerful book, like its predecessor *Ponder These Truths*, has been compiled from Swamiji's inspiring early morning meditation talks given in the Samadhi Hall of Holy Master Swami Sivanandaji's sacred Samadhi Shrine in Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh. Seekers throughout the world will find within a universal message and a compelling call.

Sanskrit language words have been put in *italics*. Normally, their meaning can be understood by the context or their English equivalent which follows within commas or parenthesis. Otherwise, the meaning can be understood by referring to the Glossary.

THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY

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Introduction

1. RESPOND TO THE ETERNAL CALL

Worshipful homage to the supreme, eternal, all-pervading Divine Reality, the beginningless and endless, the infinite and eternal Spirit Divine that is the source, substratum, support and ultimate fulfilment of all existence, even as the ocean is the source, support and ultimate fulfilment of countless millions and billions of waves upon its surface—ever remaining the mighty, unfathomable, immeasurable ocean, never perturbed by the infinite, numberless waves disturbing its surface!

Even so, the one great Reality, the Cosmic Being, the source and origin of countless millions of universes, ever remains the one, non-dual existence, the great silence, the great peace, the transcendental Reality, present and hidden as the subtlest of the subtle, beyond the senses and which the mind and intellect cannot comprehend. That Reality is the centre of your being. That Reality is your essential, eternal identity, your *nija svarupa*.

May that Reality shine forth in your consciousness as the true “I AM” beyond the little “I” that dominates our lives, that pushes us, pulls us, that twists and turns us and shoves us up and down. This little “I”, you are not.

Three words that were proclaimed by the illumined and liberated sages and seers of the Vedic era must ever pervade your consciousness, dwell in your heart, direct your intellect and guide your entire life: *uttishthata jagrata nibodhata*—Arise, awake and attain illumination. The whole of the process of your being and doing, thinking and acting, should be this process of arising, being awake and alert, and attaining illumination. Then alone we are living.

That is life—a steady onward and upward ascent towards Divine-consciousness, Reality-awareness, Self-experience, Knowledge. There is nothing higher than that, greater than that. It is the culminating pinnacle achievement of all existence. Call it *brahma-jnana*, call it Christ-consciousness, call it *satori*, call it the Supreme Tao, call it *nirvana*. It is the one, supreme, non-dual experience that liberates you forever from your bondage to yourself. It liberates you forever from this dream of being bound to a non-existent conglomeration of names and forms—this universal appearance.

The queen Madalasa rocked the cradles of her infant princes and sang this lullaby: “You are all-pure, enlightened and immaculate. Give up this sleep of delusion which makes you give value to that which has no value, to endow it with a sense of reality through ignorance. This is a great blunder. This is the darkness of the slumber of non-awareness.”

That is the call you have to respond to. That is the call of the Upanishads. Give up this deep sleep of delusion. You are the all-full. You ever shine as a centre of radiant and dynamic Divine-consciousness within your apparent physical-mental personality. Awaken to your Divinity. Affirm your Divinity. Assert your Divinity, and make life an expression of your Divinity.

This is the one and the only teaching. This is the one and the only message. Awake, answer this call. Affirm your Divinity. Express your Divinity. Make your life a dynamic expression of what you are by giving up the dream and sleep of thinking of yourself to be what you are not. That is the one great need if right here and now, in the midst of this vale of tears, in the midst of the ever-changing names and forms of this temporary universe, you are to be rooted in the strength of your true nature.

Reality never changes. You are what you are. Be what you are and make your life an expression of what you are, namely Divinity. Then life becomes true life, authentic life, real life.

May responding to this call be your one great task, great privilege. May this be your joyful duty. Blossom like a lotus in the midst of the water and mud of this *samsara*. Shine like a diamond amidst pebbles. Be wakeful amongst the slumbering, alert amongst the heedless, active amongst the lethargic, and thus transcend appearances. Become rooted in Reality and celebrate your life as a glorious overcoming, victory and attainment!

2. UNTIL THE VERY LAST BREATH

To enter into the spiritual life is a rare blessedness; it is a great good. To take it seriously and engage in active spiritual *sadhana* is a second blessedness and a still greater good. But, to persevere in the spiritual life, to be ever progressive and ceaseless in one's spiritual life, is the greatest good, the crowning blessedness.

One makes up one's mind: "Come what may, until the very last breath persists in this body, I shall not swerve from the path of *sadhana*. Until the very last breath is in the body I shall persevere, I shall dedicate myself to the divine life. I shall be a *yogi*; I shall ever be intent upon attaining the Goal. I shall never slacken my efforts, much less cease my endeavour.

"Till the very last breath I shall be a *jijnasu*, a *sadhaka*. Come what may I shall be a *yogi* till the very last. Anything else may be uncertain, but this is certain. All else may be undecided, but this is decided once and for all. I am determined that the spiritual life will be my life, the spiritual goal will be my goal. And God will be the central fact in my life. I shall live my life for God and His attainment."

Thus, if one gladly takes upon oneself, after serious deliberation and firm conviction, this "do or die" approach and attitude to life, that would indeed be the crowning glory of one's *sadhana* life. This is the greatest good; it is the supreme blessedness. And it is to such a *sadhaka* that success comes, success is sure, fulfilment awaits.

Here there is no doubt or vagueness. The Cosmic Being gives Itself to one who has totally given oneself to the Cosmic Being, to one who is prepared to live or die for That. This is for sure. One who has left everything and asks only for That, That gives Itself fully and totally to such a one. This is the truth.

INTRODUCTION

Therefore, rejoice greatly that this choice is before you. Rejoice greatly that this opportunity beckons you. Rejoice greatly that the dispensation of the Divine is that to each seeking soul belongs that for which its life is offered and lived until the last. “Those that give themselves unto Me, to them I give Myself.” This is the declaration.

Therefore, this is the life, this is the time, this is the great opportunity. Let each day be lived with the awareness of this great good fortune, with the awareness of this supreme blessedness, of this golden opportunity. Then we shall have nothing to regret. Rather, we shall have all reason to rejoice.

There is a concept in the West which is applicable to the field of heroics: “Success and victory is to those who dare.” Again: “A coward dies a thousand times, a brave man but once.” And that one death comes in triumph, in success and in victory. It is the crowning glory, and it is assured for those who dare. More than in any other field of human endeavour, such daring and dedication, such defying of death itself is called for in the life spiritual.

May the grace of God and Gurudev make you of that stuff. Coming into contact with the philosopher’s stone, iron no longer remains as iron; it becomes pure gold. Not without meaning has the Cosmic Being brought you into living contact with the sublime, life-transforming, spiritual wisdom teachings of blessed and beloved Holy Master Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji. Having thus come into contact, be heroes in this strife. Dare to live the spiritual life unto the last and crown yourself with the supreme blessedness of success, victory and a life triumphant!

Part One: The Spiritual Preceptor and the Disciple

A. THE ESSENCE OF THE GURU-DISCIPLE RELATIONSHIP

Discipleship is a golden key to blessedness if the disciple enables the *guru* to live and manifest through his personality and life. The light of the *guru* should shine through the disciple every moment of his living, wakeful life. Then, indeed, every moment the disciple will move forward and benefit himself. He will be the gainer and progress towards the great Goal. This is the truth about true discipleship—that one makes oneself a centre in and through which the *guru* manifests and shines.

3. THE HEART OF THE GURU

We are now approaching the great annual day of worship of those who bring light to dispel the darkness of spiritual ignorance in our interior, who take us from unrealities to the Reality, who enable us to go beyond the ever-recurring, revolving wheel of birth and death into that realm of everlasting, rebirthless life. The celebration of Guru Purnima pays homage to those beings, those great ones, who having reached that abode, having liberated themselves forever, have turned back and engaged themselves in illumining others, in liberating others.

What is in the heart of these great teachers? Why do they act and engage themselves in ceaseless work when they have no motivation for acting, having fulfilled all that has to be fulfilled? They have done everything that has to be done, attained everything that has to be attained. They have no more wishes, no more desires, no more wants, no more intentions, no more *sankalpas*.

They thus revel in a state of supreme satisfaction, contentment, for they know that there is nothing more for them to do. Their hearts are full; they desire nothing. And so, if the Lord were to place before them the bounty of all His countless millions of universes and say, “Take this,” they will reply: “Keep them, for You have blessed me in a far greater manner. You have taken away from me the shackles of desire. You have graced me with the supreme gift of perfect desirelessness, perfect contentment, perfect fulfilment. What greater blessing can you offer me, O Lord?”

What could be the motivation for such beings to continue to act when there is no longer any need to act—when they have attained everything and are in a state of supreme plenitude and peace? What does the Indian spiritual genius have to say about the heart of these great ones? It says that if at all one could attribute to them any desire—if you want an explanation from your point of view—then you can say that they do have one thought, one intention, one desire, and that is that all sincere seeking souls who are in quest of the Goal Supreme may attain that goal, that they may be in the same state in which they are.

With that one urge from within—a spontaneous urge not arising out of mind, intellect, thought, feeling, emotion or sentiment, because they are established in a state totally beyond,

transcending, all these—there is a spontaneous intention of supreme love and goodwill that all may be established in the great state that they have attained by the grace of the Supreme. That is the only intention with which they act.

And, therefore, when that is the one urge that moves them to act, the least that we can do is to strive to the best of our ability to become like them, to approximate the ideal that they have placed before us by their own ideal life—to respond to their call, to become liberated here and now in this very life, not in the distant future, not in some post-mortem life, but now, here, so that even while in this body we are yet a liberated being, a *jivanmukta*.

That indeed would be the highest Guru Purnima worship, the highest expression of devotion to the *guru*. Therefore, striving with all earnestness, all sincerity, ceaselessly try to be like them, aspire to be like them and pray to them: “By my own effort and intention, this will never be possible, because of all my weaknesses, drawbacks and imperfections. May you, therefore, out of your infinite grace, complete it, make it full and whole.”

And, they are ready to do it. The great spiritual master, Paramahansa Ramakrishna, said: “Even if you do one sixteenth of whatever *sadhana* has been done through this body of mine that will be more than enough. You will attain perfection. You will become a liberated being. You will go beyond all sorrow. You will be established in a state of joy and bliss.”

Therefore, let us all be in a state of oneness, let us all join together and collectively make our life a sincere, earnest and grateful response to this great and glorious urge that makes these perfect beings wish to bestow the same perfection upon others, the urge that makes them continue to engage themselves in this great work of awakening the human world into a state of higher awareness of their divine destiny.

Be it so! Let this be your highest worship, highest devotion. Then, verily, Guru Purnima will not merely be a religious day upon the outer secular earth plane of your life, but it will be a great spiritual landmark, a spiritual turning point in your interior unto *satchidananda*-consciousness. That is what life ought to be, and by the grace of God and the loving benedictions of Gurudev, may it be so! God bless you!

4. GURU-BHAKTI

God is an unknown entity. God is an unseen entity. However, with absolutely irrefutable logic, rational argument and reason, Vedanta establishes the fact of God. And through analysis we can infer, “Yes, there must be a God; it stands to reason. It is irrational to suppose that there cannot be such a thing as God. There must be.” And scriptures also tell us that He is a Being who is sacred, who is holy, all-pure, noble and sublime. But, nevertheless, God is still for us only a concept of the mind. We have not seen God. We have not touched, nor tasted, nor smelt Him. We’ve only heard about Him. We can only infer Him. We can only imagine Him.

But then, if we are able to see in a human individual manifestations of holiness, of sanctity, of purity, of sublimity, of nobility, of goodness, of loftiness of conduct, character, nature, sentiment, thought, feeling and action, if we see something out of the ordinary—something extraordinary, something special, a manifestation of those qualities that we have been taught to associate only with God—then we say: “If such a human being can exist, God must exist. Otherwise, from whence do these qualities come which we do not normally see in anyone?” When we see this divinity, this holiness, this sanctity, we begin to realise: “Yes, God I have not seen, but godliness I have seen. All the qualities attributed to God by the scriptures, by saints and sages, in all religious contexts—those I see in an unusual measure, in an extraordinary measure, in this being. Because I have seen this being and this being is known to me, I am assured that God is. I know there must be a God.” And in the Vedic tradition the *guru* is such a being. The *guru* becomes for us *pratyaksha devata*, visible God. God reveals Himself through the *guru*.

The *guru* thus becomes the linking factor, a channel for putting the wandering, lost *jivatma*, the individual Soul, back into contact with its source, God, the Universal Soul. And just as the *guru* is a channel for the *jivatma* to re-link itself with the *paramatma*, even so, if we can create a channel between ourselves and our *guru*, then that channel will become the effecting means of receiving from the *guru guru-kripa*, all that the *guru* is—the knowledge of the *guru*, the sanctity of the *guru*, the purity of the *guru*, the spirituality of the *guru*.

And that channel is called *guru-bhakti*. That is why the significant verse in the Svetasvatara Upanishad: “*yasya deve para bhaktih yatha deve tatha gurau, tasyaite kathita hyarthah prakasante mahatmanah*—If you have supreme devotion to God and the same kind of devotion to your *guru*, then to you, the essence, the subtle truths of the scriptures become revealed.” Thus it is that through *guru-bhakti* the *sadhaka*, the seeker, the disciple, creates an effective link, a connection, a channel which enables the *guru* to share with the disciple what the *guru* has been endowed with from God.

So, we have to provide a way for the *guru* to give what he wishes to give. And that is through *guru-bhakti*, devotion, where there is no place for the ego. If the thought comes, “I have got great *guru-bhakti*,” then finished, that *bhakti* becomes cancelled, it is nullified. You yourself must become the very embodiment of that love, that devotion. There should be no awareness of some being, some person having that quality of devotion. Then it becomes a subtle spiritual ego. The very purpose of the existence of the *guru* is to remove the separatist I-consciousness, the consciousness of being a separate being or entity, and if *guru-bhakti* becomes a means of boosting and sustaining that *abhimana* (ego), *ahamkara* (egoism), then it loses its purpose and becomes self-defeating.

Thus true *guru-bhakti* is egoless, *nirabhimana* (without ego), *vinamra* (humble). Sabari was *bhaktisvarupa*. She had great *bhakti* for Rama, but she was not conscious that she was a great devotee of Rama. Neither was Hanuman conscious that he was a great *bhakta* of Rama. It was his very nature. He was an embodiment of devotion for Rama. The *gopis* of Vrindavan did not know that they were great devotees of Krishna. They said: “All we know is that He is the one object to be adored. We don’t know anything else. We cannot do anything but adore Him. We are that adoration. It is our very self. We are not different from that. Take it away from us and we will die, we will cease to exist.” They were filled with that love, not with egoistical awareness of that love.

The greater the growth of devotion and the greater the reverence for the *guru*, the greater is the inflow of the *guru*'s grace. The greater the desire to carry out the ideals and principles of the *guru* in life and the greater the keen eagerness and firm determination to carry out the instructions of the *guru* faithfully, meticulously, day after day, in one's daily activities and life, the greater is the inflow of the *guru*'s grace. Gurudev was never tired of again and again reiterating: "Obedience is better than reverence." And Vivekananda came down heavily upon mere sentiment and emotion. He said that this sentiment has ruined us. We have become backboneless; we lack a sense of purpose.

And what have the Upanishads put before us to illustrate true devotion? One disciple came to his *guru* as a young boy and the *guru* told him that it was his duty to collect firewood daily for the *havan*. He went on doing it without questioning. He was not allowed to cut green trees; and so the whole day, with great difficulty, he searched for and cut dry wood, put it on his head and returned only in the evening. The *guru* never gave him any spiritual instructions or teachings. Years went by. The disciple forgot time, until one day he realised he had become old, his hair and beard had become silver-white. Suddenly he burst into tears: "What is my fate? My whole life has passed away and the *guru* has not yet given me *brahma-jnana*." He had become old. He had served his *guru* without question ever since he was a young boy. That was his devotion.

Another disciple was asked to take the *guru*'s cattle to pasture. He had to be with the cattle all day. The *guru* did not ask his wife to prepare any lunch for him, and he did not have permission to drink milk from the cows. So the whole day he went hungry, only quenching his thirst with water. Days, months, years passed this way.

And one disciple was asked to irrigate the *guru*'s fields. He had to let the water into the fields and make sure that it did not leak out. After working the whole day, one evening he discovered a leak in one of the earthen walls. He tried to plug it with some clay. It kept leaking. He tried all methods to repair it, and finally not knowing what else to do, he decided to plug it with his own body. So he lay down, curled himself into a ball and stopped the leak. After nightfall, when he had not returned, the *guru* became anxious and so with several of his disciples went searching for him. Finally they found him in his curled up position stopping the leak.

That was the type of *guru-bhakti* they had. It was not mere sentiment. It was true *guru-bhakti*. It had iron behind it. It had immense strength behind it. It had determination, *sattvic* determination, behind it. These are a few towering examples of *guru-bhakti* in our scriptures. There are many others. They come from all traditions. They are all *sanketa matra* (indicators) of the stuff that *guru-bhakti* is made of. It is divine power, it is divine force, not merely silly human sentiment, not merely emotion.

When such *guru-bhakti* is there towards the *guru*, such obedience, such great desire to carry out his behest, biddings and teachings, then illumination automatically descends from the *guru* to the disciple. The illumination in which the *guru* is established comes like a spark flying from one end of an exposed wire to another. For when the weeping old disciple was taken by the *guru*'s wife to the *guru* and explained why he was weeping, the *guru* replied: "What! What do you mean, you have no illumination!" Immediately, the disciple became illumined. Why? Because of his total self-effacement, total dedication, his unquestioning carrying out of the behest of the *guru*, because

of the exemplary type of devotion that filled his heart: “I have come to a *guru*. I must serve him. This is my greatest good fortune.”

Thus the most effective way of deriving maximum benefit from the *guru* is to create a channel of lofty, sublime devotion to the *guru*, heroic *guru-bhakti*. And it is that heroic *guru-bhakti* where there is the greatest love and reverence combined with the highest obedience, the highest desire to please the *guru* by carrying out his instructions, that becomes the great channel for the inflow of *guru-kripa*. In that way, spiritual vision dawns and you “see” Reality, you “behold” Reality.

That is the tradition. That is the true inner dynamics of the *guru sishya* relationship through which the disciple is able to benefit in a maximum measure from the *guru*. Thus we have known from our scriptures, from our ancient *bhaktas*, from the narratives of ancient disciples, their relationship to their *gurus*. Thus we have learnt this great secret. May we all be benefited.

May the grace of all the *brahma-vidya-gurus*, from ancient times up to the present, be upon you. May you ponder deeply, reflect deeply, upon what an ideal disciple should be, what constitutes real discipleship, and become benefited thereby.

5. GURU SISHYA YOGA

It is through developing proximity to Reality and then contact with Reality, that one ultimately becomes Reality. It is only through *sparsa* (touch), it is only through contact, that a philosopher’s stone is able to turn iron into gold. If you keep it a hair’s-breadth away, the iron will forever remain iron. No matter how powerful the philosopher’s stone is, it cannot exercise its power unless the base metal comes into actual contact with it.

This lets us into a great truth: It is in developing a living contact with a source of transforming spiritual power that one becomes illumined, one becomes divine, one becomes transformed. Thus, the way to derive maximum benefit from our *guru* is by connecting ourselves to him. We do it through faith, *sraddha*. We do it through supreme devotion, *parabhakti*.

Is there an additional method of contacting the *guru*? Yes, and one that was constantly, repeatedly reiterated by Gurudev. Gurudev said: “Obedience is better than reverence.” Devotion is good. But what is the sign of devotion? What is the practical proof that you are really devoted to the *guru*? It is to be sincerely, earnestly and seriously desirous of carrying out his instructions and living according to his teachings.

To walk along the path that the *guru* has made for us and to go in the direction he has pointed out is the sign of true love and devotion. That is *bhakti*. *Bhakti* also means *seva*. *Bhakti* means serving the *guru*. And what is the greatest service that one can render to the *guru*? Try to be like him. Try to do exactly what he has asked you to do. For this effects an even deeper contact and connection. When you are living the teachings of the *guru*, you are in the deepest contact with the *guru*, you are in the deepest state of *yoga* with the *guru*.

Guru sishya yoga is present in its highest and most intense form when the disciple makes himself the very embodiment of the teachings of the *guru*, the very personification of the *guru upadesa* (instructions), the *guru ajna* (orders) and the *guru adesa* (commands). That is why Sanjaya was able to utter the concluding *sloka* of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita—*yatra yogesvarah krishnao yatra partho dhanur-dharah; tatra srir-vijayo bhutir-dhruva nitir-matir-mama* (Wherever is Krishna, the Lord of *yoga*, and Arjuna, the ideal disciple, there are prosperity, victory, happiness and firm policy—such is my conviction). When the full carrying out of the *ajna*, *upadesa* and *adesa* of the *guru* is present, everything is wonderful, everything is auspicious, everything is blessed. It is certain fulfilment and victory. Everything is certain when this type of *yoga* between the *sishya* and the *guru* is there.

This inner fact is a very important truth that is revealed in the Gita. For in the beginning, Arjuna is the very contrary of a *sishya*. He says: “I will not fight.” At the outset, he even questions the correctness of the *guru*’s teachings, because he is in a state of ignorance. He is in a state of delusion. He is in a state of deep attachment, completely entangled by himself, in himself. He is a slave of himself. He is entangled by his own emotions, his own sentiments, his own desires, his own whims and fancies, his own attachment and *bhranti* (delusion). But very quickly he is made to realise his folly. In the second chapter he says: “*sishyas-te ’ham sadhi mam tvam prapannam*—I am Your disciple. I have taken refuge in Thee. Please teach me. Please guide me. Please enlighten me. Please lead me; otherwise I am lost.” Thus he appeals to the *guru*.

Now, there itself is the first transformation. Arjuna gives up his own self-assertive state of saying “I am right,” and he is able to recognise his delusion. He does not rebel when it is pointed out by the Master: “What has happened to you? What is this type of *moha* (delusion), this *kasmalam* (dejection) in which you are caught? Are you not ashamed? Stand up! Stop this!” When he was chastised, immediately it worked. He realised: “I am doing something very foolish, something wrong.” And so he says: “I am sorry. I was not myself. I take shelter at Your feet. Please instruct me.”

Thus, from then onwards, there is established this connection where he is eager to receive, wants to be guided, wants to be taught and is willing to listen. And his earnestness and sincerity are brought out by the questions he asks: “Please, this is not clear to me. You say this, You say that. I am confused. Kindly, out of mercy, compassion, make this clearer to me.” He wants every doubt cleared. He is a *jijnasu* (seeker of Truth). Right from the start he keeps on asking, and Krishna keeps on giving.

So you must see that the Gita teachings commence when the *guru sishya* relationship has been voluntarily undertaken and fully expressed: “I am Your disciple. I take shelter at Your feet. Remove this delusion. Tell me what is good for me.” And at the culmination, when their *samparka* (contact) becomes fruitful in absolute discipleship, we have the grand last verse. What is the fruit of such discipleship, this type of *yoga*, *guru sishya yoga*, this inner connection between the seeking soul and the illumining, liberating master? The glory of it is brought out in the last verse of the Gita. If there is such obedience, if there is such oneness, *samparka*, then all auspiciousness and blessedness, all plenty, prosperity and victory become assured.

Therefore, by the grace of the Lord and the blessings of Gurudev, we have been able to ponder this important aspect of the *guru sishya* relationship. We see that the greater the *samyoga* (contact), the greater is the illumination and benefit to the disciple and the greater is the ability of the *guru* to go on sharing, giving and transferring—“Yes, whatever I have is yours. Come, take it.” This is possible only if this *samparka* (contact) is there.

The great *samparka* is *bhakti, parabhakti*. A further *samparka* is constant living in the spirit of the *guru*'s teachings, the constant carrying out of his instructions, fulfilling all his *ajnas*, making oneself the embodiment of *guru upadesa* and *guru adesa*. This becomes the deepest connection, heart connection, innermost connection between the *sisya* and the *guru*. The *sisya* becomes the embodiment of the *guru*'s teachings. He strives earnestly and diligently to make himself the very personification of *guru upadesa* and *guru adesa*. This is the greatest blessedness. This is the essence of discipleship. What is *sishyatva* (disciplehood)? It is making oneself the very *pratikam* (image) of the *guru ajna, guru upadesa* and *guru adesa*.

6. THE ESSENCE OF THE GURU-DISCIPLE RELATIONSHIP

The blessed holy land of India has given us the goal of God-realisation as being the supreme, ultimate, most important and highest goal of human existence. Its ancient wisdom and living spiritual experience went beyond heaven and hell, sin and merit; it went beyond all relativity and soared into the dizzy heights beyond the reach of mind and speech. It entered into a direct, absolute experience of the Great Reality that is supremely non-dual, that is one without a second, beyond all duality, beyond the three *gunas, gunatita*, beyond the pairs of opposites, *nirdvandva*. This holy land discovered and gave to us carefully formulated and tested scientific paths to attain this innermost spiritual experience that lies at the heart of all religions, and it has thus put the entire world under a debt of gratitude.

This ashram is situated in a land where the unseen is the real, where man is divine, where life is a process of attaining the realisation of God, and where every action is regarded as part and parcel of this adoration, this worship and this attempt to reach God; the whole of life is pervaded by the spirit of *yoga*. It is a land where sages, saints, mystics and holy people in each generation have lived the spiritual life of renunciation, austerity, penance, prayer, devotion, worship and deep meditation, and having attained illumination have left behind for us the proof positive that this Reality exists, that this path is valid. If practised in such a way, the same experience can be attained by you, me and everyone.

Thus, spiritual life is a possibility. It is a reality; it is not a fantasy. Through their lives, generation after generation, this great discovery of ancient times was proved to be true again and again. It was tested and not found wanting; it was tested and found true, authentic, genuine, practicable—yielding results.

The uniqueness of your lives is that you have received this as your heritage, and having received it you have embraced this great ideal, and you have made it your life. You have made your life a spiritual process, a spiritual ascent towards Reality, towards liberation, towards divine

perfection. Thus, through your lives, their lives have proved fruitful. “Lives of great men oft remind us that we can make our life sublime.” What is the use if no one followed, did not want to become sublime? These great ones would have lived in vain.

But, it is not so. To this day, everywhere in the world their teachings are still benefiting and guiding seeking souls. Therefore, through our lives we vindicate their renunciation and penance, their silence and seclusion, their self-denial and deep spiritual meditations. We vindicate their worth. Thus we are meant to understand life. We are to live to fulfil a great ancient ideal.

But then, the essence of such living is a deep inner conviction of the reality of that great Goal. And the essence of such living would also be an intense desire that we should attain that Goal and also the willingness to pay the price. For the sake of the Goal, a disciple must be willing to give up everything petty, and, most important of all, be willing to give oneself up, to renounce one’s little self, to renounce the very reality of one’s temporary, earthly being. “Whoever clings to his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life shall save it.” “Kill this little ‘I’. Die to live. Lead the divine life.”

All great souls have discovered this same truth and have proclaimed it in slightly varying words. “For it is in dying to the little self that one attains to everlasting life.” “When shall I be free, O Master?” The Master replies: “When ‘I’ shall cease to be.” The disciple, now knowing, then says: “Then shall I be free, when ‘I’ shall cease to be.”

Therefore, our ancients have said: “This can be attained through discipleship—*tadviddhi pranipatena pariprasnena sevaya*. Go to a *guru*, sit at his feet and ask for his knowledge.” The *guru* says: “Yes, I am here to remove the ignorance that is your bondage and give you knowledge. I am the surgeon who will remove the cataract and restore your vision.” But then, if the patient says: “No, no, no, I want my vision restored, but I do not want my cataract removed; it is mine, I like it, it is part of me; cure my blindness without removing the cataract,” then the surgeon will say: “Sorry sir, that is not possible. The cataract is something that you do not require. It is your enemy not your friend, your liability not an asset. You have to get rid of it. I am helping to remove the obstruction to your vision so you can once again see, to bring light in place of darkness, to remove that which is causing the darkness.”

Thus, the essence of the *guru* is to remove the ignorance that is the cause of bondage, sorrow and suffering. And the essence of the disciple is a keen eagerness, a great desire, to be free from ignorance, to get rid of this layer of ignorance and attain illumination. Unless there is this willingness, this deep eagerness to attain illumination, then the disciple is no disciple. A hundred *gurus* cannot help unless the disciple has a great desire for liberation and is seeking to get rid of that which stands in the way.

Ultimately, the innermost quintessence of real *tyaga* is renunciation of oneself, the renunciation of one’s very identity, because that is the quintessence of ignorance. *Maya* abides in the *jivatma* as *ahamkara* (ego). The *svarupa* of *avidya* is *ahamkara*. The essential nature of ignorance is ego, considering oneself to be the body. Therefore, the essence of discipleship is the willingness to die to one’s human personality and identify oneself with one’s *nija svarupa*, one’s own true nature, to give up what constitutes the ignorance within one. If one clings to it, the *guru* may be a *sad-guru* or he may be *sakshat bhagavan*, but he will not be able to do anything.

So, the essence of the principle of the *guru* is the removal of the darkness of the disciple. The essence of discipleship is the desire for this removal. When these two meet, it clicks. The disciple should be hankering, eager, yearning to get rid of this darkness in the form of ego. Thus the disciple approaches the *guru* seeking the necessary *kripa* and instructions to achieve the removal of this false ego-principle.

If something has fallen into our eye and we cannot see, we go to someone and say: “Please, see what is in my eye and kindly remove it.” If a person is suffering great pain and requires surgery to remove some obstruction, he seeks help. The surgeon does not seek him out, because the surgeon is quite all right. It is the sufferer who wants to get rid of suffering. So, one who wishes to get rid of pain searches and finds one who is capable of removing the pain and submits himself to this removal.

So, there must be a keen desire for liberation and the willingness to submit oneself for the removal of that which stands in the way. If that is present, then this removal becomes possible. If it is not there, not all the *sad-gurus* in the world can help you. This is the spiritual situation. This is the spiritual situation between the *jivatma* in bondage and within *maya* and a *sad-guru* who can help him come out of his bondage. This is the crucial point of spiritual life and all *guru*-disciple relationships.

“Take everything, but not my ego.” If the disciple says this the *guru* replies: “Sorry sir, that is the one thing that has to be taken. God has brought me into your life only to do that work. All other things are only superficial. They are only frills, fringe benefits. The main thing is this: Darkness has to be removed by bringing in light. You have to submit yourself.” So, deeply the essence of discipleship should exist in the disciple’s consciousness, in the disciple’s heart, mind and intellect.

This is to be deeply reflected upon. The crucial, central thing in the spiritual life, in the life of the spiritual seeker and his coming into relationship with a *guru* is one’s desire to get rid of oneself, the desire to transcend oneself. That should be there. There should be a keen grasp of the essence of the spiritual process, be it *Vedanta* or *raja yoga* or *bhakti yoga* or *karma yoga*. One should have a deep, correct understanding. Gurudev himself was an outstanding example of this *sadhana* of the annihilation of the ego.

One must grasp this simple fact that the ego is our enemy; it is our problem. It actually constitutes our *samsara*, our *bandhana* (bondage). We should not fall in love with it and want to maintain and pamper it. If you keep it safe, then forget about liberation or peace of mind or happiness. Forget about it. Keep your ego; carefully nourish it, nurture it, protect it, take care of it. But forget about everything divine, everything spiritual, everything worth having. You will be left with what you want, what you are. Unwilling to forgo your ego, you will be left with that only; and possessing it, you will be the poorer.

You cannot keep the ego and attain God. They are like the South Pole and the North Pole. This is the truth. This has to be grasped; this has to be understood. And, with a subtle *buddhi*, *vichara* and *viveka*, one should be able to grasp this central fact about the spiritual life and take action in the light of this understanding.

God grant you that inner intuition and understanding. Gurudev help you to be a true disciple, for life is short. Time is fleeting—days, weeks, months, years flow away. We cannot take it easy. Be earnest, be sincere and be correct in your apprehension of what is spiritual life, what is *yoga*.

B. WHAT SHOULD BE THE RESPONSE OF THE DISCIPLE

It is said that without Grace Divine that the proximity to a spiritual personality and the active benedictions and blessings of that spiritual personality are not possible in this earth plane. Our exceptional and rare circumstances of being provided with an ideal environment and all that is necessary and beneficial for our spiritual evolution proves that we are extremely fortunate recipients of God's grace, that God's grace is present in abundance in the life of each and everyone of us. If we recognise this truth we will feel uplifted; we will feel no room for despair.

In this Iron Age, in this world of ours, in the situation prevailing in human society today, we will realise how blessed we are to be in a spiritual atmosphere with the rare blessedness of the company of other seekers. All these things and more have fallen to our lot thanks to divine grace, the blessings of saints and our own meritorious past.

Given these circumstances and given these facilities, if we will but make use of all our time and energy and direct our attention to the Goal Supreme, we can make each day a forward and onward process towards God-experience.

Therefore, lead a spiritual life, a divine life. Be essentially an aspirant and sadhaka. Have no other identity. In your subjective consciousness feel: "I am a seeker after the great Reality. That is my truth, that is my real identity. I am a seeker and Divine-experience is my goal, divine living is my way."

Thus, with God's help, absolute faith in the words of Gurudev and, above all, command over your own self, have an intense faith in your ability to attain the Goal, given the right exertion, the right effort. That indeed is the way of recognising the precious nature of the gift that you have received from God.

7. SELF-AWARENESS AS DISTINGUISHED FROM EGO-CONSCIOUSNESS

As you sit in Gurudev's vicinity, proximate to him, what do you pray for, what do you ask for from the Divine Presence in which you are? What do you ask for from the indwelling Divinity which is always with you, to which there is no question of distance or proximity? It is always near you, ever by your side.

In the proximity of Bhagavan Sri Krishna, Arjuna asked: “*sishtyas te’ham sadhi mam tvam prapannam* (I am Thy disciple. Instruct me who have taken refuge in Thee).” Lord Krishna told him that in the proximity of enlightened and illumined divinity one should give reverence, serve and seek to know, be a *jijnasu*. A *jijnasu* is one who is in quest of knowledge.

A quest for knowledge arises when I feel that my present knowledge is inadequate, and, therefore, I wish to know, I wish to make my knowledge full. This feeling that my knowledge is inadequate can only come if there is a basic simplicity and humility in one’s nature. If there is self-sufficiency, if there is a self-sufficient ego-consciousness, it is an obstacle to such seeking, it is contrary to such seeking.

Gurudev used to say: “If a thirsty person wants to drink from a tap, he has to bend low. Therefore, if you want to have knowledge, you must accept your inadequacies, be humble and lower your self-sufficient ego-consciousness.” Thus Arjuna was told to pay reverence to the master, serve him, and then seek to know, ask with humility. This then is the process of receiving knowledge, illumination.

Egoistical consciousness is one thing, self-awareness is another. Self-awareness, an awakened awareness is desirable. Egoistical consciousness is not desirable; it is an obstacle. One must distinguish between them. Arjuna became a seeker when he became self-aware. He knew that he was in a very bad situation. As a prince in charge of an army, he had a certain duty, *svadharma*. He became aware that he was in a deplorable state, and so in that state of awareness of his true psychological condition, he pleads with Lord Krishna: “Show me the way, I am confused. I do not know, Master.”

So, this is self-awareness. He was aware of himself as one who had proved weak at a time when strength was needed. He was aware of himself as one whose knowledge was inadequate. He was aware of himself, therefore, as one who needed to be told and guided. Therefore, he was aware of himself as a disciple.

A disciple-consciousness is also a certain ego. But, nevertheless, it is not an assertive, *rajasic* ego-consciousness. It is an awareness within. Without individualistic ego-consciousness, he was aware within himself of a condition, of a need. Thus, in this state of awareness, he was able to approach Lord Krishna.

The Upanishads say: “*uttishthata*, arise,” and then they say, “*jagrata*, awake.” Why did they not say, “*jagrata, uttishthata*”? Because *uttishthata* symbolises the shaking off of *tamas* and *jagrata* means to be awake, aware, awakened—a state of *sattva*. And at the very beginning of the Gita, Lord Krishna says to Arjuna: “*kshudram hridayadaurbalyam tyaktvottishtha parantapa* (Cast off this mean weakness of the heart. Stand up, O scorcher of the foes). Therefore, He repeats the Upanishadic call of *uttishthata*—stand up.

At the very end of the Gita, Arjuna gives us the key to what our response should be to this Upanishadic call: “*sthitosmi...karishye vachanam tava* (I am firm...I will act according to Thy word).” That should be your response. “I have shaken off *tamas*. I am now in a state of *jagriti*,

because I have awakened to the truth of things. I am now in a state of inner awareness. I will carry out Thy word.”

So, this inner state of *jagruti* is the keynote to successful spiritual life—to always be in a constant inner state of *jagruti*, wakefulness, no matter where you are. It ensures a certain state of mind: “If I am always aware that I have attained the lofty status of a *manava*—a thinking, reasoning animal—then I must base my life on rationality, think before I do something, and select that which is noble, which is good, *sreyas*. I must try to be an ideal human being and not give way to animal propensities. I must put this status to the highest and best use, and thus benefit myself and benefit humanity.” This awareness itself becomes an urge for striving for perfection, an urge towards idealism.

This awareness is not egoistic. It is a non-egoistical self-awareness. If, for example, one is always conscious that one is a Brahmin, then this awareness, if filled with *sattva*, will not bring about caste superiority; but, on the contrary, it will always keep you alert and aware. It will always keep you on the right path: “I am a Brahmin. Therefore, I cannot do anything that is against the ideals and *dharma* (the duties) of a Brahmin.” So this awareness conduces to evolution, to progress, towards idealism, to becoming higher and better day by day.

This self-awareness, therefore, is not egoism. It is an ingredient that is essential for progress. It is *jagruti*. It keeps one awake within. It is a response to the Upanishadic call, *jagrata*. And this awareness which gives us an urge to be ideal is coupled with a humble knowledge, “I am a Brahmin, but I know that I am not a perfect Brahmin. I have got a lot to do. I have many drawbacks, many imperfections, many weaknesses which I must try to get rid of and thus be a true Brahmin.”

It is the same with a spiritual aspirant. If one’s self-awareness is *sattvic*, one is also conscious, “I am a spiritual aspirant, but not an ideal one. I must constantly improve myself, become better day by day.” So this awareness, because it is *sattvic*, is always coupled with humility. Awareness of one’s imperfections, therefore, fills one with an urge to strive for better and better levels of being and doing.

We are not touching upon the higher spiritual dimension of your divinity: awareness that you are divine, ever awake to your divine destiny. Even where we are, in whatever field we are living our life, awareness upon that level is necessary—awareness of one’s being a student, being a seeker, being a *grihastha*, being a *sannyasi*, being a disciple. All these awarenesses, even upon a comparatively lesser level of life, are desirable. As a matter of fact, they are preliminary states of awareness that may ultimately lead us to become aware, awake upon a higher dimension, a higher plane of our essential divinity. That can wait until we fulfil our task of evolution in self-perfection upon the lesser levels of being.

For, if we consciously practice awareness now, wakefulness now, it will naturally lead us ultimately to that state of awareness and wakefulness upon the higher divine dimension of our essential spiritual nature. That will follow as a matter of course; therefore, it can wait.

Top priority should be given to wakefulness and self-awareness as we are, where we are. That is the key to evolution, the key to progress, to a steady, upward ascent of our personality. God

bless you all! God make you liberate yourself from *tamas* and be awake! God make you aware and keep a continuous wakefulness within!

8. SUPREME GRACE AND SELF-EFFORT: THE LIFE TRIUMPHANT

Worshipful homage unto the supreme, all-pervading Universal Presence, our eternal source, our present, invisible support and our ultimate goal, attaining which our lives become fruitful! Worshipful homage unto that great Reality, that is our true abode now. It always has been and always shall be at all times our *nija dham* (own abode), our *svasthana* (own place) and our *asli ratan* (real wealth). May divine grace which constitutes Its very essence lead us day by day in all that we do as the living of our life!

May divine grace guide your footsteps and lead you on, so that your life becomes a meaningful and gainful process towards the ultimate attainment and experience of that ever-present Divine Essence. It is for this alone that you have been endowed with this most covetable, most invaluable human status. Great is the grace the Universal Spirit has bestowed upon the individual soul by conferring upon it this status which is verily the portal to blessedness, the right royal highway to liberation and divine perfection.

Similarly, great is the grace of the Cosmic Being in coming to us in this life as our worshipful and beloved *guru*, for in the ultimate analysis, the *guru* is grace personified. It is divine grace, it is that Cosmic Being who comes to the seeking soul as the *guru*, as the spiritual preceptor. And thus manifesting grace, It guides us to the Goal. Therefore, it has been said: “*Guru* is Brahma, *guru* is Vishnu, *guru* is Siva, *guru* is the ultimate, transcendental Being, the Absolute Being.” Such is the grace indeed that infills each individual human life when the individual has been induced, one way or another, to come into the spiritual path, has become a *mumukshu*. For *mumukshutva* is also a manifestation of grace.

And bringing one into the spiritual path brings the seeking soul into direct spiritual contact with a realised, enlightened, illumined saint and sage. That is the ultimate grace; all that is needful has been done. Now, it is for the seeking soul, the *sadhaka*, the *mumukshu*, the *jijnasu*, the *yogi*, to recognise this grace and to start utilising it. This is, therefore, the point where *purushartha* or *sadhana* becomes the dominating overall factor in one’s life.

In various ways this truth has been revealed to us, but nowhere more aptly than in the parable of the twenty golden talents. Before a master goes on a long journey he calls his three servants and says: “I am going away for a long time. To each of you I give twenty golden talents. Use them well.” And the master goes. What has to be given has been given. There is nothing lacking; the grace is complete.

It is, therefore, the utilisation of this grace that constitutes the essence of spiritual life. It is recognising the value of that which has been received and putting it to the highest and best use that constitutes *sadhana*. Where grace, its recognition and self-effort coexist, then there is great blessedness, all success, the wealth of wealths, the supreme attainment.

It is this truth that is the declaration of the closing, final verse of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita wisdom teachings—the coexistence of fullest grace and its fullest application through *sadhana* or self-effort. This is the ultimate good and this closing verse of the Gita needs to be pondered upon.

The first chapter of the Gita puts before us the inner situation of the individual soul before the commencement of the spiritual life, a situation of a twofold pull within the heart of the individual in two opposite directions—the divine and the undivine, the spiritual and the unspiritual, the cosmic or supremely transcendental and the merely worldly. There are these two forces ranging one against the other. That is the situation in the human heart before the spiritual life has commenced, before *sadhana* has stepped into one's life.

But when this situation is resolved in the best manner in a fortunate awakened human being, in the manner most conducive for the highest welfare and blessedness of the individual, there emerges this ultimate state of fullest grace and fullest, ready, willing and sustained self-effort—*param kripa* and *purushartha*. That is the life triumphant.

The confluence, the combination and the dynamic presence of both these factors—divine grace and an awakened and aware self-effort—grace accompanied by self-effort, grace enhanced by self-effort, grace augmented by determined and purposeful effort to see that this grace is not in vain—that grace will bear fruit in the form of highest blessedness.

This is to be reflected upon and to be deeply understood, for all of us are recipients of grace, are beings possessing a great golden wealth. Our lives have been enriched, and the Being who has thus endowed us watches and waits patiently for our response. This response, when it is there, is called spiritual life; it is called *sadhana*, aspiration, *abhyasa*. Call it *yoga*.

Therefore, to all the blessednesses add your own genuine spiritual aspiration, your own devotion and dedication to the ideal of the spiritual life. It is this bringing unto the grace and blessings that we have received our earnestness, our sincerity, our effort, that brings about enlightenment. This is the simple truth provided that it is done every day, provided it is persevered in, provided it is continuous, as continuous as divine grace and the *guru's* blessings.

This is the condition, this is the need from our side—this constant affirmation, confirming our dedication to the spiritual life. It has to be daily and always there, constant and continuous. Then we see the miracle. Then there is nothing that can stop you.

Thus it has been with all spiritual giants past and present, the globe over. They never gave up. They again and again affirmed their devotion and firm abidance in their ideal. This is the one thing needful: a genuine longing, a sincere, earnest yearning that is affirmed each day and that is kept up, persevered in, continuously and ceaselessly. Then miracles can take place.

The call has come into your life. The hand has been stretched out towards you. Grasp it, respond, and become blessed. This verily is the essence of your life here as a *sadhaka*, *jijnasu* and a *mumukshu*. Your supreme blessedness lies in the extent to which and the manner in which you answer the call, grasp His hand and rise to the occasion. Never cease, but always strive until this supreme blessedness is attained, not in the hereafter, but here and now!

The simple truth is that you who come and pray for blessings and grace are already blessed and graced. Faith in God, a desire to be blessed by Him and to be in His good books: “Let me live in a way that I may not displease God or act against His divine will. Let me try to be what He wants me to be. May He bless me”—such feelings arise only in a being who is already graced and who has received blessings from God and His saints. This is the truth. Otherwise, there would be no aspiration in your heart, no desire to come to Rishikesh, no desire to engage in *sattvic* activities like attending spiritual programs. This, therefore, is the assurance that you now have to utilise the grace and blessings which you already have.

9. AN AWAKENING MUST BE FOLLOWED BY PURPOSEFUL ACTION

Homage unto the all-pervading Cosmic Being, the Universal Spirit, *visvatma*, the Eternal Reality! And worshipful adorations to Gurudev, that very Cosmic Being manifest as a world awakener, a world spiritual teacher and a path-pointer!

A *guru* is a *guru* because he brings into our life the light of wisdom, an awakening impulse. He points out to us the path that leads to life’s fulfilment—to the *jivatma* attaining *paramatma*. He points out the means and the methods, the direction and the path. He awakens the *jivatma* from the slumber of Self-forgetfulness, the slumber of ignorance, *ajnana*, the slumber of *avidya*, *dehadhyasa* (identification with the body).

The *guru* is not only an awakener, he inspires us to make use of our wakefulness in purposeful action. If one who is awakened from his Self-forgetfulness, his ignorance of his destiny, does not engage in purposeful and proper action, does not put this wakefulness to highest use, the awakening, though better than slumber, proves infertile, proves fruitless. Therefore, the ending note of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita, the most important utterance of Arjuna, is: “*karishye*—I shall act, I shall do.” Arjuna, who said, “No, I shall not do, I shall not fight,” in the beginning, ends up by saying: “I shall do Your bidding.” It is almost an answer to the Upanishadic call of *uttishthata jagrata prapya varan nibodhata* (Arise, awake, having reached the wise become enlightened). The fallen Arjuna is now not only awakened from his ignorance but he stands up ready to fight.

Wakefulness with action is called *sadhana*. It is called *abhyasa*. *Yoga* is primarily engaging in a self-determined and self-directed activity which propels the *jiva* ever higher, upward and Godward, towards God-realisation—thus the significant term *yoga-abhyasa*.

The *guru*, therefore, is an awakener and an inspirer. He is a path—*apradarsaka*—he is one who throws light upon the path, who shows the path. But the treading of the path must be determinedly undertaken and engaged in by the fortunate disciple. Discipleship is in obedience and in action, in being and doing. “Be what I want you to be. Do what I want you to do.” Thus says the *guru*.

All *yoga* is, therefore, the response of the seeking soul, the *sadhaka*, the *jijnasu*, to the call of the *guru*, in the same manner as Arjuna responded by *karishye* (I will do), and followed it up by standing and picking up the bow once again in his hand. Thus he engaged in the action that was

called for at that time and attained victory in the war. Eighteen days of ceaseless activity brought about victory.

Therefore, diligently the sincere seeking soul must engage in spiritual *sadhana*, knowing that the source of all power and energy is God Himself. “Thy will be done, and let me have the insight and the power to engage in action for the due fulfilment of Thy will.” Even so, the disciple should engage in spiritual *sadhana*, but without a sense of *abhimana*, ego. “Yes, even this I am enabled to do by Your supreme mercy and grace. *Naham karta harih karta tvatpuja karma chakhilam* (I am not the doer; Lord Hari is the doer. All work is Thy worship).”

A mother, with great love, prepares food for her slumbering child. She wakes it up, places the food before the child and urges it to eat. But the eating has to be done by the child. There is an old saying: “Two men can take a horse to a river, but twenty men cannot make it drink.” That has to be done by the horse.

Therefore, *sadhana* is the hallmark of the *sadhaka*; *yoga-abhyasa* is the hallmark of the *yogi*; prayer, worship, is the hallmark of the devotion of the devotee. Discipline, self-control, ceaseless effort to ingather the mind and to check its wandering, to centralise it, to focus it towards the great ideal—this is the hallmark of the *dhyani yogi*. Worshipfully engaging in one’s duties and activities, remembering the Divine Being throughout the activity itself, in the midst of the activity, and offering up the activity at the feet of the supreme, ever-present Reality is the hallmark of a true *karma yogi*.

Thus, in the ultimate context, all spiritual life, all *yoga*, all *sadhana* is the devout engaging in the right and appropriate kind of spiritual activity by the seeker, the *sadhaka*, the *yogi*, the devotee. It is, therefore, upon this plane of action and reaction, action and the fruit of action, this outer plane, that the law is fulfilled. Significantly, in the Gita, the Lord says that whether you wish it or not, the Cosmic Nature, which resides in you as your own human nature with its outgoing tendency of the mind, will impel you, compel you, oblige you, to engage in numerous and various activities. When this is inevitable, why not be wise and direct it towards your divine destiny? Why not be wise and spiritualise it? Why not be wise and make it a means of connecting yourself with the Divine, linking yourself with the cosmic source of your being? Why not be wise?

Such wisdom in action is called *yoga—yogah karmasu kausalam*. “If I have to engage in action, let me not be foolish and make it my problem. Let me not allow it to take me into further bondage, greater Self-forgetfulness. Let me not allow action to be a breaking up of my connection with the Divine. On the contrary, let me be wise, let me have wakefulness and an inner awareness, so that my activity is done with an attitude and an approach that makes it a means of moving towards the Goal.”

Thus acting, the actor becomes not merely a *karma yogi*, he also becomes a *jnani yogi*. Action is based on wisdom, infilled with *jnana*. And he desires to elevate his activity to such sublime heights because of his great desire, his love for attaining the Lord. There is in it a keen longing to obtain the Supreme. There is *bhakti*. *Bhakti* and *jnana* automatically become the moving forces infilling all activity.

So, the true *yogi* cannot help being a *jnani*, a *bhakta*, a *yogi* even in the midst of activity. Therefore, the activity of people who have adopted the spiritual life, who have entered the path of *yoga*, who are engaged in *sadhana*, is not the mere activity of the man of the world, the bound soul who is in love with the world and its things—a *samsari*—one who is impelled by desire, by attachment, by craving, the urge to taste the transitory pleasures of the petty objects of this universe. That action leads to greater darkness and bondage. The activity of one who is awakened, one who is wise, is a spiritual activity in every sense of the term, in which the ingredients constitute *jnana*, *bhakti*, *yoga*, and it is filled with *vairagya*, dispassion.

It is a totally different kind of activity: a liberating activity, a spiritual activity, a God-oriented activity, a wisdom-based activity, an activity at the centre of which there is wakefulness, an awareness, and a lofty and sublime purpose. So, the inner *svarupa* of this activity is purely spiritual; it is *yogic*. This is the inner content of those who have adopted the life spiritual, who have entered into the path of *yoga*, who are engaging themselves in spiritual *sadhana*.

Therefore, may your life be a confluence of *bhakti*, *jnana* and *yoga*, and may all your activity be a *sadhana* for God-realisation. May it be God-oriented, directed towards the supreme Goal, thus helping you to connect yourself with God at every step, at every moment. May the grace of the Divine and the choicest blessings of the Holy Master enable you to understand this aspect of your life, to reflect upon it and to elevate your so-called ordinary day-to-day life to a lofty height of higher awareness, purposefulness and direction.

Thus may all of your life be to you a fulfilment of this central aspiration—not part of your life, but all of your life. May your entire life be a divine life.

Towards this end, strive with diligence and wisdom, unaffected by the outer factors that constitute the passing scene around you. That will continue to be what it is. The transformation is within yourself. You cannot change the outer world, but there is every need for you to be a changed being inwardly. That is the secret of a successful spiritual life.

You must be a living Vedantin. You must be a practical *yogi* at all times, not only when you are in your meditation or puja room. There is no partial son to the parent; there is no partial patriotism; there is no partial conduct and character; there is no partial Vedanta; there is no partial yoga. They are either total or not at all. This is the truth.

This truth should be clearly perceived and recognised. One should not have a mental block to seeing this truth fairly and squarely. We may play a part, but we cannot play a game with God.

10. TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

If Gurudev means anything at all to a sincere seeking soul, that meaning is to make our life divine. If he means anything at all, it is a divine life. His presence here is to inspire us, to touch and awaken our dormant Divinity—by his glance of grace to awaken us to our own awareness, to awaken from within us our reality which is Divinity.

This is a centre for removing the veil across our vision which hides the Divinity that pervades everywhere and is ever present before us, for removing the inner veil that hides from our vision our own Divinity, for we are part of that all-pervading, infinite, eternal Cosmic Reality. Being parts of that infinite Cosmic Reality, we partake and share of Its essential nature in our own essential being.

We may be different in our non-essential appearances, but we are all one, identical, in our hidden true nature, our hidden, eternal, unchanging essential nature. We are the distilled quintessence of pure Divinity. We possess within us the ability to recognise this potential and to seriously, earnestly and sincerely struggle, strive and aspire to awaken the sleeping Divinity that we are. We have the potential to persevere in this attempt to continuously awaken and manifest that only and to refuse to manifest any lesser aspect of our non-essential outer self.

The outer self is made up of limiting adjuncts: the senses, the inner cognising faculties, the life-currents, life-principles—*pancha karma indriyas*, *pancha jnana indriyas*, *pancha pranas*, mind, intellect, ego-sense, memory, imagination, thought and sentiment. Refusing to identify yourself with and rejecting the demands for expression of these lesser, imperfect, passing aspects of your present human personality; and being ever persisting, insisting and firmly determined to express only that which you are (to unfold, awaken, express and actively manifest only that part of you which is your reality, your eternal identity, that part of you which is one with the Cosmic Reality); to be insisting, always resolving, determining and persevering in the continuous attempt, in this unbroken practice of manifesting your Divinity—that is true discipleship to this invisible spiritual presence. That is the token of our reverence for this invisible spiritual reality.

That is the one and only way we can offer our genuine homage, our authentic recognition of his *gurutva*: “He is my *guru*; he is my spiritual teacher; I follow him.” This is to be demonstrated by our persistent, persevering, continuous, unbroken attempt—again and again, and yet again—to make manifest our higher nature (our real nature, our essential divine nature, the God-principle within us which we are) and not anything else. This is leading the divine life. This is Yoga-Vedanta. This is the *sadhana* of Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji.

And to enable us to engage in this *sadhana*, his penance, his renunciation, his realisation has brought into being this outer, greater manifestation of his in the form of this holy ashram. He has brought into being this ashram to offer us a field for engaging in this essential Sivananda *sadhana*, Divine Life *sadhana*, to offer us varied facilities to manifest our Divinity.

If this ashram means to you this attempt to manifest your Divinity, to make use of each and every factor that could be a help in this inner process of expressing outwardly the Divinity that you are, then this ashram is verily deeply meaningful to you; this ashram has been understood by you. You are wise, you have vision. Otherwise, even if he has, by the collyrium rod of knowledge, removed the obscuring cataract of ignorance and opened your eyes, yet you have closed them once again, refusing to see.

Ajnana timirandhasya jnananjana salakaya; chakshur unmilitam yena tasmai sri gurave namah (I prostrate to that *sri guru*, who has opened with the collyrium stick of divine knowledge, the eyes of him who was rendered blind by the darkness of ignorance). They say that if there is

intense eagerness to see and recognise the truth of things—the reality of the world, the universe, the environment, the setup in which we are living—then the task of the *guru* in restoring one’s vision would become fruitful.

But if a delicate, a very delicate action has been performed and the veil that obscures your vision has been removed and your sight has been restored so that you can perceive and be benefited, if you then close your eyes, then the restored sight will not serve any purpose.

Therefore they say: “Arise, awake, open your eyes and live with vision!” Live recognising the value of that which surrounds you; recognise the value of this here and now situation—the present situation in which God has blessed you to be. Then everything will become meaningful; everything will become invaluable; everything will help you to lead a truly divine life—to manifest in thought, word and action day after day, every moment, the Divinity that you are.

The sharing of today, therefore, brings to you what discipleship to this great, worshipful and beloved being must mean to each and every one of you who is in this ashram. This sharing is a call upon all of you to never forget the Divinity that you are, to ever live in this keen awareness, alert awareness, of the Divinity that you are, and to make this wonderful golden setup the means of unfolding that Divinity, of blessing yourself and blessing everything all around you, within and without—blessing, by your Divinity, your surroundings, the ashram and every being that you come into contact with.

Thus, to manifest our discipleship to this being, the one key word is Divinity. The one key word to make your life authentic, genuine, effective, true—that key word is Divinity. The one word that sums up your relationship with worshipful Gurudev is Divinity. Divine you are; divine may your life be, divine your thoughts and feelings, divine your words and actions!

11. PERMEATE YOUR LIFE WITH DIVINE BHAVA

Worshipful homage unto Thee, O Thou Universal Spirit, all-pervading, endless, eternal and infinite, Thou who art the ever-present Reality behind and beyond the ever-changing, transient and fleeting names and forms of this vanishing appearance that we call this world! Thou art the ever-present Reality whom the unfortunate do not see or feel, whom the bound and perverted cannot accept, and whom the obdurate deny. Thou art the one Reality—absolute, non-dual, One without a second.

All this is verily a manifestation of that Brahman. That Brahman alone shines in all that is seen, heard, touched, tasted or smelt. That Brahman alone shines in all that has ever existed, in all that now exists and in all that shall exist in the future. He indwells all things as the one and only Reality: “What speech cannot reveal, but what reveals speech, know that alone as Brahman, and not this that people worship here. What mind cannot comprehend, but what cognises the mind, know that alone as Brahman, and not this that people worship here. What sight fails to see, but what perceives sight, know that alone as Brahman, and not this that people worship here. What cannot be

heard by the ear, but by which the ears are able to hear, know that alone as Brahman, and not this that people worship here.”

This is the fact, this is the truth, this is the experience declared by the sages of towering spiritual experience. They proclaimed this mystical truth, this great divine mystery, that there is only One and there is no other. The many do not exist, for the One alone has become the many. This is to be heard; this is to be carefully listened to; this is to be deeply reflected upon, and this is to be intensely and continuously meditated upon.

And if this hearing, reflecting and meditating upon the truth is to gradually fructify into an experience, it should be supported during our entire day by the attempt to invoke from within us this vision through feeling, through *Atma bhava*, *Narayana bhava*. This feeling should be kept up: All is verily that one, great Reality that pervades all, indwells all, interpenetrates all, supports all, and is all. This feeling is spiritual *bhava*, *divya bhava*, divine *bhava*.

Hearing, reflecting and meditating are but processes—physical, psychological and super-psycho- logical—but not supra-psychological. They may be very high, refined, subtle mental processes, but yet they are mental. They are not supra-psychological; they do not go beyond the mind.

Feeling alone, intense *bhava* alone, has the power to ultimately take you beyond the mind into another level of consciousness, another dimension of consciousness. When the Reality becomes for you a really real reality—not just by hearsay, not as a mental thought, not as a logical conclusion arrived at through rational processes—then it becomes the basis of your looking at this world, knowing this world.

It is only when *bhava* comes into your life as a permanent factor in the way you approach life and in the careful attitude you cultivate towards everything you have to encounter from morning till evening, that something happens and things stand before you in a different light. For then alone this *bhava* will take you from processes to the Reality which cannot be reached by processes. Even deep meditation—the mind is still, it is not functioning—is a super-mental process only. It cannot take you into a level beyond the mind. And it is also for the time being only. You cannot be immersed in it twenty-four hours a day.

Therefore, there is no other way left than to permeate your life with a divine *bhava*, a divine vision where you behold not the many but *eko devah sarvabhuteshu gudhah sarvavyapi sarvabhutantaratma, karmadhyakshah sarva- bhutadhipasah...*(God, who is one only is hidden in all beings. He pervades all and He is the inner soul of all beings. He presides over all actions and He dwells in all beings).

There is but one Divine Principle, one Divinity hidden in all things, concealed in all things. Until your *bhava* penetrates the outer appearance and tries to embrace the concealed, hidden Reality, your senses will perceive only the outer name and form. That’s all they will be capable of. It is only *bhava* that penetrates and goes into the heart of the matter.

In this lies salvation. In this lies the way. In this lies the solution to the problem of the many that demand, attract and rivet our attention to themselves, not allowing us to go beyond and penetrate the covering, the facade, the barrier, the armour of appearances, within which the one Reality in all beings is hidden.

That vision has to be developed through *bhava*, through feeling. This was the heart of Swami Sivananda's teaching: All is divine. See all as divine. Have a divine attitude towards all. Knowing all to be divine, connect yourself with God in the midst of the most intensive activities. Knowing that all is divine, live in God each moment of the day. Knowing that all is divine, make your life divine. Live divinely. Lead the divine life and be free.

That was the call of the master. And, if we are followers, if we are disciples, then this call has to be answered. That is the only proof of true discipleship. Respond! Kill this little "I". Die to live. Lead the divine life.

This call ever issues forth from Holy Master's permanent presence, and each moment of every day should be a response to this call to lead a divine life permeated by divine *bhava*—seeing with a sight and a vision that goes beyond your mind and intellect, seeing through a vision that is in That, and in that level of your inner being.

Behold the world as God. In this lies our liberation. In this lies the success of our spiritual life. So be it, and may God and Gurudev grace and bless you to make your life such a divine life!

We have to decide whether or not we are having the right approach to the guru and his teachings. Are we to serve the guru, or do we expect the guru to serve us? Are we to obey the guru and carry out his instructions, or do we expect the guru to obey us and carry out our instructions? Are we to make the guru the guide and put ourselves into the mould of his teachings, or do we want to make the guru take the mould we wish him to take? What is the exact relationship between the disciple and the guru? That should be clearly grasped and clearly decided in our hearts.

12. BE AWARE OF THE GURU'S PRESENCE

Loving adorations to revered and beloved Holy Master Guru Maharaj Swami Sivanandaji in whose spiritual presence we are at this moment, and whose spiritual presence surrounds us from without as multifarious scopes for our spiritual evolution in our chosen field of spiritual *sadhana*! Whether it is selfless service, devotion and prayer, concentration and meditation, inner discipline in the form of *japa* and *kirtan*, or enquiry, discrimination, analysis and investigation through a keen, subtle intellect, sharpened by study and by listening to the same teachings, his spiritual presence draws us from all sides towards our highest blessedness, our greatest good, the supreme and successful fulfilment of our earth life.

That presence also prompts us from within to a life of goodness, prompts us, urges us, inspires us towards a life of truthfulness, purity of conduct and character, and of compassion and

kindness. And, by the power of his own lofty, inspiring example as well as his dynamic, awakening teachings, to be saintly, to be a good Samaritan, to be holy in our thought, word and deed.

Thus his spiritual presence is not confined only to this sacred Samadhi Hall. After this morning's spiritual fellowship, as you return to your respective rooms, his presence walks beside you. As you enter your room, you enter into his presence. His presence is also there as the thoughts over which you are reflecting. His presence is not confined to this 60 minutes from 5 a.m. to 6 a.m. It pervades this entire ashram and prevails at all times, from morning till night and during the night as well.

If you are conscious and aware of this presence, his presence is a hundredfold more; you feel it a hundredfold more. If you are either in a state of forgetfulness or a state of distracted attention, with your thoughts elsewhere, then his presence does not lessen one bit, but you deprive yourself of his presence to that extent. You deprive yourself of his uplifting, inspiring spiritual support, of his elevating influence, even as one can deprive oneself of fresh air. If one tightly closes all the doors and windows of his room, the air will soon become stale. Not that there is not enough fresh air and light. It is there in plenty, but we deprive ourselves of it if we foolishly bar its entry by not understanding what we are doing.

So, whether it is done deliberately or whether it is done unknowingly, the result is the same. We cut ourselves off from that which is very important, very valuable, very desirable and very necessary. Therefore, to cultivate conscious awareness of the wealth that we possess and conscious awareness of the need to utilise it moment by moment in all of life, constitutes one of the important ingredients of discipleship. If this awareness of the immediate presence of the source of your inspiration is not consciously, diligently, carefully, patiently, earnestly, sincerely cultivated, then no harvest will come.

It is not sufficient for a farmer to just sow the seeds, important as that is. He must follow it up with great labour, unlimited toil, day after day until he reaps the harvest. It requires ceaseless vigilance to protect that which he has sown. One of the essential ingredients of a true Buddhist, for example, is a conscious awareness that the great Enlightened One is not a WAS personality of 2500 years ago, but He is very much an IS power, an IS principle, an IS presence—an IS factor and not a WAS personality. If this is lost, the Buddhism of the Buddhist is lost.

The Christianity of a true, devout Christian is similarly such a living awareness of the here and now presence of the great Master: "When I rest at night, He is there beside me, watching me. When I wake up in the morning, He is there beside me. When I go about my daily business of life, He is by my side." It is this awareness that makes one a real follower of the great Master.

For then, in this watchful presence and as true followers of an ideal teacher, we will at all times, upon each step of our day-to-day life, before we act, feel: "What will he think? How would he who is beside me want me to act at this moment? How would he wish me by my action to bear witness to my discipleship, to my loyalty to his teachings, to his perfection which I keep before me as my ideal?" For the disciple follows the ideal placed before him by the *guru* in and through his own human personality.

The essence of discipleship, the essence of being a true follower of any great teacher, is, therefore, the awareness of the presence of that teacher—both as an ideal as well as a teaching, both as a light upon the path as well as the path. For the teacher's *upadesa*, his spiritual instructions, his wisdom teachings, shed light upon the path. And the teacher's life, by embodying all that is lofty and sublime, all that is noble and spiritual, becomes the way: "I should live even as my teacher lived. I should walk and talk even as he taught by the way he walked and talked."

Great teachers never belong to the past. They belong to the present as well as to the future. They are ever present. The *guru* is never absent. He is never removed. He is always immediate, both in space as well as in time. He is even more immediate in Consciousness that does not relate either to space or to time. He is always there. You are always in It, and It is always within you. It is something that does not need the support of space or time.

Therefore, cultivate the consciousness of the permanent and perennial presence of the *guru*: "He pervades all my life. He prevails throughout my being and throughout the living of my life. He always prevails. He is with me morning, afternoon, evening and night. He is with me wherever I go, not merely when I go to his temple or his *samadhi*. I am myself a living temple of his presence, and in and through me he continues to live and to shine. He draws me in the right direction from without, and he urges me in the right direction from within."

This, indeed, is the key to true discipleship and to a successful spiritual life. This is the way to obtain the highest and the maximum benefit from that being we call the spiritual master or the *guru*. This is the inner spiritual truth about the subtle and unparalleled relationship of a sincere seeking soul and the *guru* that is sent in order to put the individual soul into contact with the great, eternal, infinite and all-perfect Universal Soul that is at once our origin, our destination and our destiny as well.

This is the spiritual truth of the inner field of one's spiritual evolution unto divine perfection. It is the "*guru* factor" that is crucial for bridging the gap between the individual soul that is wandering in this phenomenal existence and the Universal Soul that is one's eternal abode, one's true eternal ground, one's real natural place of being, one's true home.

The *guru* is, therefore, a visible manifestation of the love and compassion of the Universal Soul. And, the true spirit of discipleship is the manifestation of the grace and blessings of the Universal Soul. When these two are present, a miracle happens—the miracle of spiritual transformation and a spiritual rebirth.

May you realise the loving compassion of God that has come to prevail in your life. May you realise the grace and blessings of God that throbs within you vibrantly as your true spirit of discipleship. Realise both of them and become truly blessed!

C. WHAT GURUDEV TAUGHT US

When a human individual attains to God-experience, in that state of perfection, how does that human individual manifest the Divinity that he has attained? This is revealed to us through the personality of Gurudev Bhagavan Swami Sivanandaji.

Try to understand Gurudev's being, his personality, the ideal person that he was, the divine life that was his.

May he be your ideal and your object of concentration day after day. May he ever be before your mental vision, illumining the path before you, attracting you, uplifting you to that level. This should be your all-pervading, great *sadhana*, this sincere, earnest attempt to be like Gurudev, this sincere, earnest attempt to rise into a state of being that is permeated with Divinity.

13. GURUDEV'S AWAKENING CALL

May each and everyone of you who are participating in this early morning spiritual fellowship enter into this new day, gifted to you by the Divine, in a higher way, in a subtler and a spiritual way, not merely in a gross and physical way.

You have the blessedness of conceiving, of making each dawn hour not merely a physical awakening of the physical body into physical activities, but simultaneously also a spiritual awakening and a spiritual activity in and through your real Self, your real nature—an awakening into awareness of your real identity.

You awaken not merely as a physical body from physical sleep, but you awake and emerge into a state of wakefulness and awareness in your real, everlasting, unchanging spiritual identity—feeling yourself to be birthless, deathless, of the same stuff as the eternal Cosmic Reality, feeling yourself to be *satchidananda*. You thus make each day a fresh awakening spiritually, a fresh rebirth, so that each day is one step higher towards the supreme culminating pinnacle-point of God-realisation. Each day adds on to your spiritual evolution, to your spiritual upward ascent towards the great goal of knowing you are never bound, the great goal of realising that you are ever free and eternally pure. It is a pinnacle-point of consciousness where you know that neither am I born, nor do I die, neither have I bondage, nor do I seek liberation—I am ever that Being, one with the Supreme Reality, unborn, eternal, ancient, beyond time, imperishable, ever present.

May this be your vision, not of something extraneous to yourself, not of another thing, but may this be your vision of yourself. May this vision be directed within your self, and, inwardly, may you behold the imperishable within the perishable. This is the vision that Lord Krishna wanted you to have: “*vinasyatsv avinasyantam yah pasyati sa pasyati*—O Arjuna, see the imperishable within the perishable. Dwelling in this body-house is something that is beyond the body. It never was not, It ever is and ever shall continue to be. Behold that the Eternal is the dweller within this non-eternal

body. See thyself with that vision. Know thyself with this wisdom-experience, wisdom-consciousness. Know that thou art free.”

Thus, Lord Krishna, through Arjuna, called upon us to turn the gaze within and know that bondage and liberation do not exist, have no meaning, for you are the ever-pure, ever-awakened, ever-free, all-perfect Reality, *nitya mukta paripurna atma tattva*.

Thus, rejoice in your freedom, rejoice in your eternal, birthless, deathless state, the truth, the fact of what you truly are. To this fact of your being, Gurudev has awakened you through wonderful musical wisdom, musical *upadesa*, *jnana* in the form of a song:

*Chidananda chidananda chidananda hum
Har halme almast satchidananda hum
Ajarananda amarananda achalananda hum
Nirbhaya aur nischinta chidananda hum
Kaivalya kevala kutastha ananda hum
Nitya suddha siddha satchidananda hum.*

Knowledge-Bliss, Knowledge-Bliss, Bliss Absolute,
In all conditions I am Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.
I am without old age, immortal and immovable.
I am without worry, without fear, Bliss Absolute,
Eternal, pure, perfect Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

We miss the point of this song. When Gurudev says that in all conditions I am Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, we interpret this “all conditions” to apply to outer conditions, whatever condition our world may be in—what is in the news or how people are treating us. But this is missing the point. In all conditions refers to your own self. No matter what condition your body may be in—healthy or unhealthy, sitting or standing, working or resting; no matter in what condition your mind or emotions and thoughts may be—pleased or displeased, calm or agitated, one-pointed or fretful, up or down; no matter what your intellect may be—creating this complication or that problem or solving them; no matter what your condition—plus or minus, “In all conditions, I am Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. I am the eternal, pure, perfect Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.”

That is *chidananda*. It is not said *satchidananda* because saying *sat* is unnecessary. *Sat* means existence. To affirm your existence is unnecessary because you don’t need anyone to tell you that you are. You know you exist. But you think you exist as Mr. So and So: “I am male, female, young, old, I belong to this country and so on.” That is where the problem arises, where the shoe starts pinching, and you weep and wail.

Because, although you know you exist, your knowledge is topsy-turvy, upside-down knowledge, which just creates problems. Therefore, know that you exist as pure consciousness, that you exist as perfect bliss— unchangeable, unchanging, eternal, pure Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. You are *chit* and *ananda*, perfectly, totally, not 99.95% but 100%. Therefore wake up. Don’t dream that you are someone else. Just wake up and know that you are what you are.

We are gathered together here in the vicinity of a light, a light of awakening wisdom, in the vicinity of an awakening voice calling us to direct our gaze within. For, no matter what condition our physical body, our mind, our memory, our imagination may be in, in the midst of all this you are what you are eternally. Nothing can alter the fact of you. Nothing can change the truth of what you are.

This, therefore, is the great call and gift to mankind, not only by the ancient sages of bygone ages, but it is the selfsame awakening proclamation in clarion tones by sages of our own times. Beloved and worshipful Swami Sivanandaji called upon us to stop looking here, there and everywhere and to start looking just where we are. He said: “Be silent and know that I AM.” Silence the mind, silence the emotions, silence the clamouring of the senses. In that inner silence know that you are the eternal, pure, perfect Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

Thus, as we benefit from our early morning worship and fellowship here, let us also benefit from the unseen presence and the powerful, unheard voice that silently issues forth twenty-four hours a day, proclaiming: “Thou art what you have ever been. You have never been anything but what you are, for that is the truth of your being.”

Let us receive this unspoken awakening message about ourselves, become awake and remain awake—live, walk and work in a state of wakefulness, never going back to slumber again. In wakefulness, may we live our life, no matter where the body is, no matter how it functions, no matter where the mind wanders and what it does. In all conditions of our interior being, may we ever be in a state of wakefulness!

Gurudev’s presence is not only confined to the Samadhi Hall, is not only all-pervasive in this holy ashram, but it lives and moves in and through you. You carry his presence when you adhere to truthfulness. You carry his presence when you are kind, considerate and compassionate. You carry his presence when you refuse to swerve even one inch from the path of purity. You carry his presence vibrantly, dynamically, forcefully when you live your life in a divine manner with determination, humble intention, firm resolve, and all sincerity and earnestness.

When you are trying to pursue a divine way of living your life in thought, word and action, you are manifesting Gurudev, you are a vibrant centre of that which the world knows as Swami Sivananda. You become a lamp through which his light shines; you become the vessel to hold the living waters of his spirituality, his sublime spiritual teachings.

Do not, therefore, confine Swami Sivananda to the Samadhi Hall. Make yourself a vehicle of his living presence so that by your life others also become awake and illumined—they feel his divine presence through your life, and their life is also divinised. Move amongst this world of men as the candle imparting your light to anyone whom God brings you into contact with.

14. DIE TO LIVE

Worshipful homage to the Reality that is everywhere, at all times, in all Its fullness— within and without, above, below and all around us, the one and only Truth that abides unchangingly—which is the cause, origin and source of countless millions and billions of universes that manifest forth from within It, exist within It, and are absorbed back into It.

We say It. That Being is neither He, nor She, nor It. Our ancients said that that Being is not this; It is That. And finding a flaw in even this reference to that Being, the great Dakshinamurti chose not to utter any words.

What can the river know about the immeasurability, the limitlessness, the boundlessness of the ocean, until at long last it ceases to be a river and becomes the ocean. Then alone, when it has lost its riverness, does immeasurability, limitlessness and boundlessness become meaningful to what was once a river—meaningful not as a concept, but as experience. Immeasurability experiences itself as immeasurability; limitlessness experiences limitlessness and boundlessness experiences boundlessness.

For there is no other to communicate experience, for there is no river. “I did not know before, but now I know.” To state this, there is no longer any river. That is why Gurudev used to oft quote that very significant sentence: “Then shall I be free, when I shall cease to be.”

When one has ceased to be, there is no question of trying to explain, of telling someone else, because there is no someone else to tell, and there is no someone to tell it. There is the ever-abiding Reality that is everywhere present in all Its fullness, within and without, interpenetrating every cell of your being.

However, as long as one is dear to oneself, cherishes oneself and gives tremendous importance to oneself, then so long one is a slave to oneself, is bound by oneself, has to suffer oneself and carry the burden of oneself. It is when one is prepared to offer oneself that the burden is lifted, the prison house is no more. Then alone one is no longer a slave, but one is free. One no longer has to suffer oneself. In that state, when one no longer suffers oneself, there is peace, there is joy.

If there was ever one thing that was vibrantly, vitally present in the heart of Swami Sivananda, it was that all of you may break free from the shackles of the delusion that you are bound, that you are finite and imperfect, that you have sorrows and griefs, pains and sufferings, that you have to overcome restlessness, agitation and troubles. He wanted you to overcome this delusion and know and feel and experience that within you there is hidden light, within you is hidden God, within you is Immortal Soul, within you is ocean of bliss, within you is fountain of joy.

Gurudev said: “Kill this little ‘I’. Die to live. Lead the divine life.” For the great “I” has no problem. Your real “I” has no problem. *Nija svarupa* (one’s own true nature) is bliss. *Nija svarupa* is peace. *Nija svarupa* is the Light of lights beyond all darkness. It is the little “I” that is all that this earth plane connotes and denotes. Always, for all times, there is sorrow for the little “I”: *janma, mrityu, jara, vyadhi, dukkha* (birth, death, old age, disease, pain).

So, Gurudev wanted us to lead a divine life, which naturally implies leading a life of joy, leading a life where the ego has been once and for all put out, snuffed out, given a safe burial; and you shine with the effulgence of your own real identity. When he sang, “Within you is hidden God, within you is Immortal Soul, within you is ocean of bliss, within you is fountain of joy. Kill this little ‘I’. Die to live. Lead the divine life,” he meant that unless and until you kill this little “I”, unless and until you die to live, leading of the divine life will be a far cry.

Therefore, to lead the divine life it is necessary for us to pay attention to this *sadhana* of rising above the little “I” and being the real “I”. It is necessary for one to awaken to the awareness that unless and until I engage myself in annihilating myself, the false self, perhaps all my ideas of leading a divine life is so much will-o’-the-wisp, a phantasmagoria. For this is of the essence: When I am there, You are not there. If You are to be there, I have to quit.

Kabir said: “*Prem ki gali ati sankari, isme do na samai* (The path of love is very narrow; here two cannot enter).” Only one Being can occupy the lane of love that leads to bliss beyond all sorrow. Thus we must awaken to the fact that leading a divine life is impossible unless one ceases to be. It is the highest good, it is the supreme blessedness, because it is only when you cease to be that you really ARE. Until you cease to be, you really are NOT.

So help me God that I may share with you this light, which is difficult to perceive, for it is not any earthly light. It is a light which shines when there is no other light, when there is darkness. In the darkness, the only light that shines is an awakened consciousness which does not illumine anything outside, but it illumines your own Self, it illumines the interior.

You may be surrounded by pitch darkness, but you will be shining within if you have awakened to this light of seeing clearly the truth that the way to bliss lies through non-being—by which alone true Being, which is eternally there, becomes experienced. In non-being is the Being known. And so long as you have not recognised this and embraced non-being, so long as you have not decided to annihilate the little “I”, so long the Being will ever be the unknown.

Therefore, may the supreme, eternal, radiant Brahman and beloved and worshipful Holy Master bless us that we may all recognise the need, the importance, the indispensable necessity of awakening the Light within, of banishing the darkness of the little “I”, which is the prolific source of all problems, all sorrow, all troubles, all vexations. May they bless us and grace us that we may arouse the inner Light Divine and make ourselves shining centres of that great Light of lights beyond all darkness.

“I am in the Light. The Light is within me.” The mystic did not stop with these two lines, but added the third and most important one: “I am the Light.” May we all have the aspiration and urge to ponder this great truth, to ever deeply reflect and dwell upon this great truth and crown ourselves with blessedness, not in the distant future, but today, this hour, at this moment!

15. THE PENETRATING VISION THAT BEHOLDS EVERYTHING AS A BLESSING

Worshipful homage unto the supreme Divine Reality, the eternal, universal Spirit Divine! May the divine grace of that Reality be upon you all. May that divine grace grant that you have the awareness that this Reality is your own innermost centre now and here. It is not only a supramundane, supra-cosmic, transcendental reality, timeless and eternal, but it is also an ever-present reality—not something beyond the reach of the mind and intellect as they say. For, it is your indwelling reality, the very centre of your being, the very essence of your being. It is nearer than the nearest thing.

And, in this world of men and things, animals and plants, mountains and rivers, cities and villages, wherever you go you are dwelling in God, for He pervades this universe. He is in every speck of space, every atom of matter, everything that exists. He is the essence of all things; He is the immanent presence; He pervades everywhere.

You can travel to the furthest corner of this world, and you will still be living in Him, moving in Him, having your being in Him. He will still be filling you from the top of your head to the tips of your toenails. You live in God; God lives in you. This is the only truth. Your whole life is filled with Divinity; your whole life is saturated with Divinity.

The entire universe is interpenetrated with the Divine Principle. To live in this truth is to live in God here and now, not after leaving this body, not in some post-mortem existence. God lives in you—radiant, resplendent, dazzling with the effulgence of a million suns. That is how they refer to this indwelling God in you. It is the central truth of your existence now, here.

How can darkness prevail when God indwells your heart? How is it possible to have slumber in such a light? If you wake up in your consciousness to the fact that you are filled with brightness, that there is no darkness within you, that there is no night of slumber, that there is a full day of wakefulness, then you will be spiritually alert, you will be spiritually awake. Your interior will be in that state which your Upanishadic ancestors wanted it to be: *jagrata, uttishthata* (awake, arise).

This is the *sadhana* that is most pleasing to worshipful and beloved Gurudev: that you all move about as centres of awakened Divinity, so that everywhere you go this Divinity radiates from you, this Divinity finds expression through your thoughts, words and actions, through the way you live your life. And to that end, every now and then, he will give you a push, a fresh impetus to stir you up—slap you and wake you up, as it were.

He gives you such opportunities in this place where you are living your serene life. He brings occasions of inundating you with spirituality by bringing to the ashram hundreds of sincere seeking souls, so that your spiritual life once again becomes vibrant, awake, alert and dynamic.

Why not see it in this way, rather than as an inconvenience? Instead of looking at it in a negative, non-productive way, why not look at it as a great blessedness? They are not mere visitors. They are devotees, *sadhakas*, lovers of God, people striving earnestly like you for spiritual perfection. So, with eagerness and longing to get away from their secular atmosphere and have a

little period of upliftment in a spiritual atmosphere, they come for a week or two and fill this ashram with the spiritual vibrations that emanate from their hearts and minds, from their aspiration and their *vairagya and viveka*.

They enhance the spiritual vibrations of the ashram by their presence; and, therefore, those who permanently reside here in close proximity to Gurudev's spiritual presence receive, as it were, a feast, a special shower of benedictions during this period. We are given an opportunity of serving them in any manner we can, of going out of ourselves to be helpful to them, to elevate and sanctify ourselves by selfless service. The Upanishads tell us that anyone who gives us an opportunity for *paropakara* (selfless service) is God. A visitor who gives us a chance to adapt, adjust and accommodate is our benefactor. Because Gurudev said that adapting and adjusting ourselves is the highest type of *sadhana*.

This, therefore, is a positive vision, a creative vision that can enrich your inner spiritual life through everything that happens to you, everything that you pass through. Everything comes to you as a plus point if you look at it with this right, positive, penetrating vision. Everything comes to you as a blessing, an enhancer of your spiritual life and its spiritual quality. It is with this vision that you should look at things—understand, grasp, and rise higher with its help. After all, you have come here to lead a spiritual life, not a comfortable and convenient outer physical and material life. You have come here to lead a life in which penance is an indispensable ingredient.

From the dawn of creation, in the context of all spiritual life, whatever the tradition, *tapasya*, austerity, self-control, penance, has never been absent. It has been an invigorating factor. It has been one of the indispensable ingredients of a genuine and authentic spiritual life—not an unwise and irrational mortification, but a wise and rational austerity and penance.

All this your life here in Gurudev's ashram provides for, if you but learn to see it as such, and learn to take it as such, and learn to recognise it as such, and learn to utilise it as such. Then you are the victor. You will attain victory. You are a true *yogi*. You are a true devotee.

It is not the outer atmosphere that is the important factor in the spiritual life, it is the inner atmosphere which you yourself create. If you can succeed in diligently creating an inner atmosphere for yourself that is not affected by the outer atmosphere and surroundings, then you have known the secret of spiritual life. You live in that inner atmosphere—serene, unaffected by the outer atmosphere. In the inner dimension of your own being, you live in God, you live in the Kingdom of Heaven.

This, therefore, is to be clearly perceived, and you must engage yourself in creating this one hundred per cent spiritual inner atmosphere. Your life is in your hands. You create your world; you create your atmosphere. And the Upanishads have always said: Dwell in the light of the truth that the Supreme Reality shines in the chambers of your heart as your own reality.

Let your interior be a state of fullest awareness of the Divine Presence shining in your interior. Never, even for a split second, are you away from God. Not even for a split second is God remote or distant from you. You live together, move together, have your being together. You live in God; you are rooted in God.

Thus live this life. What can the world outside do to you? Interact with God every moment. Do not react with the outside. This is the great example put before us by all the mystics, sages and seers. And this ashram of Gurudev provides sufficient, adequate opportunity for elevating yourself to the highest state of spiritual blessedness, if you can see it.

God bless you to recognise your blessedness. God bless you to recognise the immense wealth and treasure which is already within your grasp. With this clear recognition, elevate yourself by your own efforts. Reach the highest pinnacle of spiritual perfection and purity and attain the supreme blessedness of liberation, peace and joy now, here, in this very life, in this very place!

16. OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, WORLD AND SELF

As spiritual seekers on this planet Earth, on this earth plane, each day we encounter and have to relate ourselves to four factors. Upon how we relate ourselves to these four factors will depend our peace of mind, concentration and spiritual progress. What are these four factors, and what guidance has Holy Master given to us in his teachings as to how we should relate ourselves to these factors?

The first factor is the inert world of matter, the innumerable, variegated, bewildering names and forms— mountains, seas, stars, planets, sun, moon, rivers, forests, creepers, minerals, rain, wind.

Second, animate living creatures—vermin, reptiles, birds, beasts and our fellow human beings. We encounter innumerable approaches and assailments from others, innumerable vibrations from others, innumerable situations.

The third factor is yourself. How do you relate yourself to yourself? You have to encounter yourself every day—your psyche, the being within, mind: emotions, sentiments, desires, imaginations, schemes, fears, anxieties, tensions, cravings, hostilities, resentments, frustrations, memories, nostalgia—a whole subjective inner world where you have to deal with your own self.

And fourth, the Being that has created all these factors and God knows what more—we only know our universe.

Have we got some formula, has Gurudev given us some guidelines, some insight and teachings as to how we should relate ourselves to these four factors? Yes, definitely!

Our immediate encounter is with our fellow human beings and all the creatures we have to encounter: monkeys, dogs, cows, mosquitos, ants. And the principle upon which to regulate your relationship with them has both a negative and a positive aspect: never harm anyone or any creature, and do all the good that you can, to as many living beings as you can, in as many ways as you can, in all the places and circumstances that you can. Positively relate yourself to the world around you in terms of how much good, how much help, how much benefit you can be. Therefore, Gurudev gave

seva, the spirit of noble, sublime selflessness and service as a golden principle by which to relate yourself to everyone around you as long as you live.

Secondly, how to relate yourself to inanimate creation which distracts you and deludes you with its solid sense of reality: “Seeing is believing. I see the world around me. This is the only reality I know. I won’t be foolish enough to imagine that there is some other reality beyond. It is all so much superstition.” In this way, through your logic and rationality you get caught into the net of the seeming reality of the non-eternal, changeful, temporary, evanescent, ephemeral, transitory appearances which dominate your consciousness.

These appearances have already overcome you, overwhelmed you, by making you submit to a sense of their reality. They are unreal; they are dream things; they are an appearance only. You must explore the myth of the reality of the seen world through deep study, deep reflection, deep *satsanga*, philosophical analysis and enquiry.

The atom bomb of Vedanta—that is the way to relate yourself to this attractive outer appearance, the world appearance of names and forms. Say: “You are nothing; you are a cipher, a zero; you cannot fool me.” In this way, you must relate yourself with knowledge, with deep wisdom and insight, with incisive discrimination and analysis, and refuse to be the least bit moved. Refuse to be drawn away from your focus upon the transcendental higher Reality behind and beyond this vanishing world appearance of temporary names and forms.

For a true Vedantin who has known of the transcendental higher Reality—which alone is real; the eternal, beginningless and endless, infinite, solid basis of all things; the alpha and omega, source, origin, support and ultimate goal of all things—compared to it everything is a non-entity, a non-existent cipher, a bubble. This conviction will liberate you from the oppressive sense of the reality of this vanishing phantasmagoria. It is nothing. It is like a mirage on the desert. This is the way the wise philosopher and the wise Vedantin relates oneself to this outer universe of names and forms.

What should be your subjective relationship with the third factor, your own psyche, your own self, your own being? In one word: self-mastery. You must be in control. You must control your senses and sense-appetites. You must subdue your mind and its emotions, sentiments and the wild dance of desires. You must subdue its uncontrollable sally into the unsubstantial future in the form of imaginations and its absolutely futile sally into the past that has gone; it exists no more. To be dominated by the past and to be enslaved by the future is the greatest misfortune, greatest folly.

Therefore, you must be in control. You must relate yourself to yourself upon the principle of self-possession, self-control, self-management. You must control the senses, subdue all passions and conquer the mind. You must be in charge and not allow the mind, desires, thoughts, emotions, sentiments, memories, imaginations to take charge of you, make a plaything of you, make you dance to their tune, make you a helpless, pitiable creature at their mercy. Never, never, never!

So, the one principle upon which you relate yourself to yourself, to your own subjective inner being, is discipline, self-control, conquest of the mind, subduing of all passions, control of all the senses and sense-appetites. You must be in charge. You must be the master here, not a slave.

Now we come to the fourth factor: the Supreme Being. What should be the principle or the pattern of your relationship? There is only one way: to love God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul—deep devotion, boundless love, *bhakti* and *prema*. We are here only in order to love God, adore the Supreme Being, to worship the Supreme Being with deep devotion and boundless love.

That should be heavenly manna to us in this essenceless, sparse, dry world; that should be our nourishment, our sustenance, our life support—deep, deep devotion and boundless love, limitless love. That should be our relationship with God. That is the greatest of all commandments. And, by all means, that love can be extended to His creation, but first and foremost, we are born to cherish unutterable devotion to God, unutterable love for our Maker.

We are part of Him. He is everything to us. Therefore, the only pattern of relating ourselves to Him—only, no other—is deep devotion, sincere heart's devotion, all our heart's devotion, and unutterable, boundless love. He is our very own; we belong to Him. He is our all in all. We are inseparable parts of Him. Therefore, the entire love of our heart should be poured at His feet. That is the one and only way to relate ourselves to the Supreme Being.

These then are the insights that beloved Holy Master has given to us for living our life in this world created by God, amidst creatures created by Him, to make our life sublime, to lift up our life from a humdrum, normal, prosaic level to a sublime, noble, spiritual level—divine level.

Thus indeed relate yourself through self-mastery, deep devotion, compassion and the eyes of wisdom: self-control in relation to yourself; deepest devotion and highest love in relation to God; total kindness, compassion, sympathy and selfless desire to serve and benefit all creatures including our fellow human beings; and, so that you cannot be diverted even one hair's breadth from the great goal of life, a relationship of wisdom and highest philosophical understanding in looking at this world which is a myth—an appearance only, which has no reality—*brahma satyam jagan-mithya* (Brahman alone is real, the world is unreal).

17. WHY YOU ARE CALLED RADIANT ATMAN

Radiant Atman! Beloved children of the Divine! Day after day, when you assemble here in proximity to Gurudev's spiritual presence in this Samadhi Hall, you chant *kirtan*, you repeat *guru stotra*, you recite *santi path*, and you go into silence. And this period of silence and physical stillness we term meditation.

At this stage of one's *yoga* life, our interior is regarded as being constituted of three factors during this process called meditation. First, there is the object of meditation, which is Divinity; it is God, it is the eternal, the infinite, the ever pure, the reality behind all appearances, who existed when nothing else existed. The second factor is the process of meditation—a continuous unbroken flow of attention and thought upon the object. These two factors are clear. But the third factor, the meditator, is not so clear. Who is meditating? What is one's feeling about oneself as a meditator? With what consciousness, what purpose, what *bhava*, are you meditating?

At the end of this period of meditation you are always addressed as Children of Divinity—always. Why are you addressed thus? Has it any connection with your meditation? What was behind this great, unvarying practice of Gurudev? It derives from Vedic times: *srinvantu sarve amritasya putrah* (Listen, all ye children of Immortality). You are being addressed in a similar manner, and there is a connection between this address and what should be the fruit of your meditation.

Calling you by epithets like “Radiant Atman” or “Children of the Divine” is a pointing out of what should be achieved during your period of meditation—the transcending of your consciousness, beyond its present state of identification with a passing personality, into a higher state of becoming rooted in your true identity: “I am an immortal, radiant divine being, part of the Cosmic Spirit. I am beyond time and space. I have neither body nor mind. I have no birth or death.”

Gurudev used to say: “Nothing exists. Nothing belongs to me. I am neither body nor mind. Immortal Self am I.” That was his formula; it was his negative description. It is the *neti, neti* way of expressing the Reality. But, Gurudev took it one step forward. He gave a positive description: “*chidananda hum, har halme satchidananda hum ajananda hum, amarananda hum, kaivalya kevalu kutastha ananda hum, nitya suddha siddha satchidananda hum*—I am this, I am eternally pure, I am eternally perfect. I am Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute. I am ever free, I am unshaken as the Himalayas, as Mount Meru. I am the Being that is firmly established in a certain state of consciousness. I am the unchanging. I do not move.”

Those who had the good fortune to live in his times will be able to recollect the transforming impact he had when he stood up and roared with his great voice: “*chidananda, chidananda, chidananda hum, har halme almast satchidananda hum* (Knowledge-Bliss, Knowledge- Bliss, Bliss Absolute. In all conditions I am Knowledge- Bliss Absolute). How his face shone! With what great force and emphasis it came out of him! He said it as a divine injection. So, he affirmed and asserted in a positive way what you are.

Sometimes in meditation our bodies are motionless, but within us there is turmoil, *vikshepa and chanchalatva* (tossing of the mind and restlessness). The mind is going all over the universe. There is no longer that serene process of the meditator, the meditation process and the object of meditation being harmoniously connected in one single unified state—a continuous, unbroken state of flow from the meditator towards the object of meditation, like the river Ganga flowing towards the ocean. Sometimes it is not there. The body may be motionless, but the mind is not motionless.

Whereas, the very purpose of your being addressed as Radiant Atman or Children of Divinity at the end of your meditation is to make clear to you that just the reverse should be the case. Your body may be involved in a hundred different movements, in continuous activity, but within you there should be a firm, unshaken state of being established in *kutastha atma svarupa*, established in That which is unshaken. It is like Mount Meru.

Within you there should be a state of being firmly established in your own Self-awareness, *atma-sthiti*. Within you there should be this absolutely unshaken, firm state of being rooted in Reality, an unshaken firmness of Self-awareness of yourself as an eternal, unborn, ever-perfect, divine Spirit. If this unshaken firmness of Self-abidance is there within you then a hundred

thousand activities can go on all around you, and you will not be affected. You will not move one hair's breadth away from that which you are, that which is your eternal, unvarying state of being. For, it is reality, and it cannot change. It is not subject to change.

Thus being established, move along in the world doing all the good that you can, in all the ways that you can, to all the beings that you can, at all times and in all places. Constantly elevate your entire life into the same level as your own eternal being—not allowing your being to be dragged down, but by the power of your established Self-abidance, uplifting everything, elevating all through each and every movement of your life. Eating, drinking, sleeping, sitting, standing, breathing—everything should be drawn up, elevated and kept upon that state.

This should be the condition. This should prevail: abidance in the Self within, allowing the body, mind, senses, hands and feet to engage in activity without any prejudice to that continued Self-abidance. That should be your status. That should be your state, your interior.

If you thus abide firmly within, if you are rooted in your Self, then all the movements of your life—your selfless service, service to the *guru*, service of mankind—will all result in making your whole life and its movements refined, subtle and *sattvic*. And, ultimately, you will be able to elevate your entire life to this same higher dimension. You will spiritualise everything. Nothing remains gross; nothing remains secular. Everything becomes spiritual. All activity becomes *yogic* activity. Your life becomes a spiritualised life.

Thus it is that you are reminded day after day: You are not this body and mind. You are not a mere *jivatma* with birth and death. You are the eternal, the *kutastha atman*, ever free, ever pure, ever perfect, ever full. In this awareness you should abide, and let the body be made to engage in noble activity, sublime selfless service. And through the power of your inner Self-abidance, elevate and uplift even the outer activity to a higher plane of divinity.

The great Sankaracharya has given us the formula of transforming every activity into a glorious adoration of the ever-present, all-pervading Divine: *yadyat karma karomi tattad akhilam sambho tava aradhanam* (Whatever actions I do, they are all worship of Thee, O Lord). Ponder this and transform your life into Divinity. May God's grace and Gurudev's *kripa* enable you to do this now and here.

18. WHAT GURUDEV TAUGHT

Different *gurus* come and show diverse practices and paths. Some give the path of *sankirtan*, some *sakti-pat*, some *kundalini yoga*, some the more traditional ways of self-discipline, prayer, worship, *svadhyaya*, and meditation. Now, we can ask: "What way did Gurudev point out for us, and in what way should his living and dynamic presence be manifest and expressed in and through our individual lives?"

Gurudev has been very specific in chalking out a certain path for us. He said: "You are divine; therefore, be what you are. Be aware of your Divinity and divinely live your life. Your

origin is divine; therefore, make Divine-experience your ultimate goal also. From where you came, that you must once again attain. That is your destiny, and your grand destination also.”

Therefore, he emphasised the words divine and divinity. You are essentially divine. You are not this cage of flesh and bones. You are not this impure, restless, ever-changing, fickle mind. You are not this limited, unreliable—sometimes rational, sometimes irrational—intellect either. Beyond the body, mind and intellect, you shine supremely as a child of God, as a ray of that divine Light of lights beyond all darkness, as a wave upon the vast, infinite, boundless ocean of *satchidananda*-consciousness. You are an *amsa* (part) of *paramatma*. Divinity is your birthright. Life is a chance to regain the awareness and experience of that Divinity. Therefore, lead a divine life. Divinity is your goal. Divinity is your basic nature. Divinity should infill your life. Therefore, make your life divine.

Thus, he has given us a very clear-cut direction, a specific way to proceed. And he gave us the quintessence, the very heart of his message, in three principles to live by: universal love and compassion towards all living beings; truthfulness in thought, word and deed; plus lofty, sublime, pure conduct and character in daily life.

He told us to adhere to these three principles. They form the essence of the message of all the scriptures of the world. They form the essence of the teachings of all the prophets, messiahs and messengers of God. These three form, therefore, the basis of righteousness, the basis of Yoga, the basis of Vedanta, the basis of spirituality, the basis of God-realisation. He had no doubt about what he was saying, and he left us in no doubt about what he wanted to tell us and what he meant us to be.

He made these three principles—non-injury, truthfulness and purity—the very condition for being accepted as a member of the Divine Life Society. He also advised and taught a synthesis, a harmonising of the head, heart and hand—an all-round development, spiritualisation and divinisation of our daily day-to-day actions, of our emotions, sentiments and moods, of our intellectual processes, and of our inner discipline. He wanted us to develop equally a spirit of service, devotion and faith in God, control of our senses, concentration and discipline of the mind as training for meditation, and an alert and awakened spirit of philosophical enquiry.

This is, therefore, the living spiritual force that he established and left for us. He works as this force. He works as this light of divine living. He who abides by these principles adores the *guru*, and he will reach the Goal. There is no doubt about it. Now or in the distant future, he will reach the Goal.

Thus, Divinity is the keynote of the Sivananda way of living your life. Divinity is the keynote upon all levels, in all things—total Divinity in your life. And, all the scriptures are to be studied just in order to know the definition of Divinity, what this Divinity implies, what this Divinity means, what comprises Divinity and its contrary. But, this one principle—Divinity—is enough to make our lives sublime, to take us to God and to crown our lives with supreme blessedness.

This is what he has given. This is what we have received. This is what should enrich our lives and the very living of our lives. That would constitute a response to his call and be a token of

our discipleship. This is the teaching he came to impart; it is our heritage. Let us claim this heritage. Let us claim our birthright and shine with the Divinity that we are!

19. HOW TO LEAD THE DIVINE LIFE

The central theme of Gurudev's gospel of divine life is that one need not leave home, family, profession etc. in order to lead the divine life. Essentially, what has to be left is *ahamkara*, the wrong idea that "I am the body, I am so and so, I am such and such," attachment to the body, selfishness, likes and dislikes.

This is what makes your life divine: eliminating undivine aspects that are part of the human nature created by Brahma, and shining with your essential Divinity. This is the central task of the divine life *sadhana*.

To make life divine requires an inner change of location, not an outer one. You shift your consciousness from being centred in your body and mind with its thoughts, emotions, sentiments, desires, imaginations and memories to a higher dimension, a different plane where the consciousness always is aware, affirms and asserts: "*aham atma nirakarah sarvavyapi svabhavatah*—I am the Atman, formless and all-pervading by nature."

That is divine life. That is the central gospel of divine life. What you have to give up is: *aham* and *mama*—I and mine, identification with the body, likes, dislikes and anger. The liberation is from slavery to the senses, slavery to the desires that arise in the mind. You have to finish this state of being enslaved by sense urges, enslaved by the mind and its countless *sankalpas*, *vikalpas* (imaginings, doubts) and desires. To know that you are more than the body, that you are divine, is divine life.

And to express this *svarupa-avastha* (natural state) constantly—day by day, from morning till night—is to live the divine life. There is this inner transformation of your consciousness which now seeks to express itself in your outer life. Your expression is no longer of a petty, small individual personality complete with one's personal likes and dislikes, prejudices, opinions and views; but now the personality begins to express itself in a sublime and noble manner so that its expressions are infilled with a divine quality—you think divinely, feel divinely, speak and act divinely, and live your *vyavahara* in a divine manner.

Thus, the inner transformation brings about an outer transformation because it is no longer the same person functioning, expressing and living; but it is an awakened awareness, a different person. It is no longer a person identifying with a body, but a person now identifying with God. "I am part of God. Divinity is my real nature. To be divine is natural to me. Therefore, to express this Divinity is my spontaneous duty." Thus thinking, one brings about a new life, a new vision, a new feeling in everything that one is and everything that one does. This is a task you must do yourself. The transformation is subjective and inner, and it is a transformation of the personality as well.

WHAT GURUDEV TAUGHT US

How this transformed consciousness can benefit the world around you is for you to work out the details. But the principle is: Every movement and every action becomes the expression of your Divinity. Every movement and every action becomes infilled with this new quality.

Be alert and be aware! Try to see whether all that you do is an expression of your Divinity, your God-nature, which is perfect already. It is trying to be what you are! It is trying to live from a different awareness and consciousness of yourself and to act upon a sublime higher level!

Part Two: The Foundation and Fundamentals of Liberation

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE FOUNDATION AND FUNDAMENTALS OF
LIBERATION

**20. WISELY DISCERN THE FOUNDATION AND FUNDAMENTALS OF THE
SPIRITUAL LIFE**

Worshipful homage unto the universal Presence Divine, the one, unchanging, permanent Reality behind the ever-changing and vanishing names and forms that go to make up this universal appearance we call the world! May Divine grace flow from It! By our lives and our deeds, may we open ourselves to that Divine grace! May Gurudev's glance of grace open up the intuition in your heart and make it perceive the basic realities of the life spiritual!

At this moment, may we remind ourselves that Divine grace is a factor that is ever present and unconditional. It is not something that is given sometimes and withheld at other times. But then, it is for us to become aware of it or to be non-aware of it. It is for us to open ourselves to it or to close ourselves—cut ourselves off from or deprive ourselves of it. It is by the way in which we live our life that we either open ourselves to or refuse the entry of grace to work in our life. It is ever present, abundant and unconditional. Grace is synonymous with God; God is an ocean of grace.

In this particular respect, there is no question of grace descending down upon us or our trying to reach out to it. For, at no moment is it ever denied, neither is it absent nor unavailable. What we have to realise is that at the commencement of the spiritual life a change is initiated in each aspirant's life. And this change is fundamental to spiritual life. But, unfortunately, the change is not kept up. After some time it is reversed. Without one realising it, one goes back to square one.

It is in this regard that one must realise that there are certain things in the spiritual life that constitute the very essence of the spiritual life. They are not only fundamental to it, they are foundational to it and have to be at the basis of the spiritual life all the time, from start to finish. When a child is born, it starts to breathe. If it is not breathing, it is made to breathe. This breathing goes on to the last moment of its earthly existence. For, breath is the foundation of life; it is both fundamental and foundational.

Even so, there are things in the spiritual life which are both fundamental and foundational that the real seeking soul cannot afford to be without. There are also variable factors in the spiritual life which one may practise intensely at one time and then, after some time, either give them up or not be so intense about them. Austerity is one example. It may change; it can be variable.

It is the difference between the variable and the invariable values of the spiritual life that the wise spiritual aspirant discerns by keen enquiry, discrimination and wisdom. He maintains the

fundamental and foundational values throughout his spiritual life, and this leads to success and attainment.

And if these fundamental and foundational values are safeguarded, preserved and kept intact throughout, then we are never cut off from grace. Grace always actively works, supports, sustains, and by every manner of means, it takes us steadily towards the Goal Supreme. Grace becomes our constant ally, our constant helper, for we fulfil all the requirements of our spiritual life by making it an open channel for the inflow of Divine grace.

Reflect over the spiritual life and thus discern the difference between the variable values of the life spiritual and the invariable values. Wisely keep intact these basic values, and you will never regret it. You will always be the recipient of Divine grace. What these basic values are, it is for each one of you to wisely discern and thus be blessed. May we all bless ourselves in this manner! May Divine grace grant you the supreme blessedness of God-realisation, liberation, bliss, peace and illumination!

B. WHAT IS LIBERATION?

Self-realisation is the realisation of that God who shines within the chambers of your spiritual heart as the very essence of your being, as your own true, essential, real Self, your eternal, divine identity—beyond this temporary, passing, changeful human identity which is only a seeming, relative reality. Your real identity is covered over by aspects of this temporary reality. And, no matter in what aspect this temporary reality is present as a covering hiding your true identity, it has to be gradually set aside, eliminated, transcended.

It may be present in a very dire, undesirable aspect. It may be present in an unavoidable aspect which is neither dire nor desirable. Or it may be a sublime aspect. But, nevertheless, as the great philosopher stated: “A cage is a cage whether it is made of iron or silver or gold.” Even a golden cage denies freedom; therefore, it must go. It may be more beautiful and valuable than an iron cage, but it serves the same function. Therefore, one day our attachment to that also must go. It is either one hundred per cent or nothing.

21. WHAT IS BONDAGE? WHAT IS LIBERATION?

The goal of all religious life is said to be salvation, liberation, illumination, which means that until that is attained people are still not enlightened. They are unenlightened; their life is not illumined. Their life is still being lived in darkness. The very fact that the objective of religious life is to attain enlightenment or *bodhi*, the very fact that religions are said to help people to attain illumination, emancipation and liberation, automatically implies that in their present state they are in a state of bondage, not liberation, not emancipation. Until he is emancipated, a slave is in

bondage. Until a person is enlightened, he is in a state of slumber, of darkness, of non-enlightenment.

What is this enlightenment? What is this state of darkness that seems to be binding all human beings and that needs to be removed so that they may attain awakening? Unless you diagnose the disease, how can you prescribe a cure?

St. Francis of Assisi ends his world-famous prayer with the words: “And it is in dying to the little self that we are born to eternal life.” Another mystic said: “Then shall I be free, when ‘I’ shall cease to be.” So, the essence of darkness, of bondage, of ignorance, of slumber, would seem to be the feeling that one is a certain specific individual with a name and form, a date of birth, a height and weight, with a certain personality and an ego. And, they say, until that is got rid of, emancipation, liberation is a far cry.

Guru Maharaj himself said: “Kill this little ‘I’. Die to live. Lead the divine life. Within you is hidden God; within you is Immortal Soul; within you is ocean of bliss; within you is fountain of joy.” All this we are not able to perceive. Hidden God we are not able to perceive. Immortal Soul we are not aware of. Bliss and joy is far off; we are always morose, dejected, depressed—all sorts of moods are there, but not joy and bliss. Why?

Gurudev says that you are not experiencing the hidden God, the Immortal Soul, the fountain of joy, the ocean of bliss because you are so much preoccupied with this little “I”, so much involved, completely entangled, overpowered, overwhelmed, and obscured by and wrapped up with this little “I”. It is like a fire that is completely obscured by thick, black smoke. The shining fire within cannot be seen; we only see the smoke, the darkness.

Thus Gurudev says that due to so much preoccupation with the little “I”, you are not able to see the bliss, the joy, the hidden God. So, what is the way? “Kill this little ‘I’.” How to kill this little “I”? Lead the divine life. So, in a nutshell, both the problem and the solution have been given by Gurudev. You are not able to see the ever-present Reality because of this little “I”. Therefore, to see and experience the ever-present Reality and be full of bliss, you have to remove the little “I”. And the way of killing the little “I” is to lead the divine life.

And the great sage Veda Vyasa who dominates the entire scene of ancient Indian religious and spiritual history like a great colossus said: “I will tell you in brief the heart of the spiritual problem of the individual soul. I will tell you the secret. Two words imply bondage and two words imply liberation. The two words that imply bondage are ‘I’ and ‘mine.’ And the two words that imply liberation are ‘not-I’ and ‘not-mine.’”

“*Is deh ko maim manna yah sabse bada pap hai. Sab pap iske putra haim. Sab pap ka yah bap hai* (Thinking the body as ‘I’ is the greatest sin, and all other sins are its children. It is the father of all other sins).” As long as our nature—our mind, thoughts, inner consciousness, our awareness of ourselves—is characterised by this “I”, dominated by this “I”, especially if the “I” happens to be *tamasic* and *rajasic*—self-assertive, aggressive, violent, exploitive, harbouring likes and dislikes and having guile, deceit, crookedness, dishonesty, falsehood, and a scheming nature—then such a life is spiritual death.

That is why the ancients said: “From such a death, O Lord, take us unto Immortality. *Mrityor ma amritam gamaya* (From mortality lead us to Immortality).” This could not be with reference to the body, because the body is not going to be immortal. No scripture ever says that this body has anything to do with immortality. Rather: “Dust thou art and to dust thou returnest.” Therefore, immortality has never been affirmed in relation to the body.

What then is the mortality that is being referred to? It is from the mortality of the ego-ridden life, which actually constitutes spiritual death. When there is no awareness of God, when the ego dominates and rules the inner consciousness, the *antahkarana*, then we are in a state of spiritual death. We are not living. Even though the body may be functioning, the mind may be active and biologically we may be declared to be very much alive, in perfect health, nevertheless, we are spiritually dead.

“Remembrance of God is life. Forgetfulness of God is death.” In the same way, awareness of our immortal spiritual nature is life, non-awareness or forgetfulness of our divine nature is verily spiritual death. And it is from such a death that the ancient Vedic prayer goes up to the Divine: “From such spiritual death, lead us unto Immortality, the immortality of Divine-consciousness, God-experience, God-consciousness.”

That, therefore, is the great prayer. The inner content of this prayer is to liberate us from this ego and selfishness. Because where there is ego there is selfishness, self-centred living, self-assertiveness, a tendency to have scant respect for other people’s feelings and sentiments, other people’s self-respect. These things are natural corollaries of ego, selfishness, a self-centred life, a self-seeking life. This is the trap. This is *maya*; this is *samsara*; this is *prapancha*; this is the bondage in which we are caught. And so, liberation commences with this clear perception, with this very clear realisation, recognition.

Therefore, at this moment, in this stage, what is death and what is immortality? What is bondage and what is liberation? What is *asat* and what is *sat*? What is passing unreality and what is truth? The passing unreality is regarding ourselves to be little, ego-characterised human personalities. That is unreality. And to rise up from this to the Reality is to be aware of ourselves as part and parcel of the Cosmic Soul, divine in nature, beginningless, beyond time and space, without name and form, birth or death.

This awareness is truth. This is the reality. This awareness is light; it is immortality; it is liberation, salvation, enlightenment. It is the supreme state of *kaivalya samrajya*. And, that which holds us back is the present state of ego-bound, selfishness-ridden consciousness and life, where everything else comes second and “I” am primary. That is the antithesis of a true spiritual seeker’s consciousness, because he or she thinks: “I am not only secondary, I am a nothing, I am a cipher. Everything else is more important.” Why? Because everything else is an expression of God. This is the true vision, the true attitude of the real spiritual seeker to life, to others and to all things.

22. WHAT IS THE GREATEST VICTORY?

There is nothing more essential, more absolutely indispensable, to be overcome and defeated than the ego. It is the greatest bondage. It is the greatest enemy standing in the way of all that is good for you, all that is auspicious, blessed and supreme. It is what stands in the way.

Long, long ago it was asked: “What is the real victory? Is it that of a great emperor leading his vast, invincible armies across a border, defeating an opposing army and conquering a new territory, or is it the overcoming of oneself by oneself?” They answered that the latter was the true victory, the real victory. Not the conquest of territory, but the conquest of oneself is the greatest victory.

It is also the greatest emancipation: “Then shall I be free, when ‘I’ shall cease to be.” They also declared: “*mano buddhy ahankara chittani na’ham* (I am not the mind, nor the intellect, nor the ego, nor even the mind stuff).” Therefore, to give a semblance of reality to the ego is the greatest ignorance, and to be in a state of identification with the ego is the greatest *ajnana*, the greatest *avidya*, and the greatest affliction—from which all creation is suffering and due to which all creation is causing suffering to everyone else.

This is a mystical, metaphysical fact. All discord, all disharmony, all clash and conflict—everything that becomes a source of pain, suffering and discontent—is rooted in the great blunder of giving importance to that which is the greatest enemy, the greatest bondage, the greatest of all afflictions. We, in fact, yield to the enemy and accept defeat when we allow the ego to rule our life. We perpetuate our bondage. We make ourselves slaves by allowing the ego to dominate our life.

You cannot walk in two directions at the same time. All the world is suffering and weeping due to the tyranny of the ego over the human individual and the living of his life from day to day. If this is recognised, already light has dawned. If this is recognised, already the process of overcoming has started. If this is recognised, already the bonds are starting to fall apart. They can no longer hold you. You are moving towards emancipation and liberation. You are moving towards sure victory.

And, you are moving towards *jyoti*, Light: “*tamaso ma jyotir gamaya* (Lead us from darkness to Light).” You are now nearing the wondrous time when this gift will be yours and you will no longer slumber, you are no longer in darkness, you are no longer in ignorance. This is the truth! Once, twice and thrice, this is the truth!

This then is worth pondering, assimilating and applying every day of your life if you really want to attain supreme blessedness—if you really want your life to be truly successful, if you really want to become blessed, liberated beings even in this very life, a *jivan-mukta* even in this very life.

You have the golden key. Blessed is he, blessed is that being, that seeker, who having received the golden key will no longer keep quiet, but will insert the key in the lock, open it and go out into the freedom that is everywhere at all times. This will indeed be the greatest step, the greatest moment in the spiritual life and the greatest victory!

23. IS LIBERATION POSSIBLE IN THIS VERY BIRTH?

Recently, I was in Delhi, and around midnight a phone call came from my host's daughter. She is a well-educated person with a good position. She wanted her parents to ask me a question, but, as I was up, I said, "Let me speak to her myself."

She said: "Swamiji, I can see that there is no real happiness to be found anywhere in this world. Please Swamiji, tell me, is it really possible to attain liberation in this very birth?"

I answered her: "It is possible if the intense desire to attain God, to attain liberation, occupies your heart as the first and foremost of all desires, all wishes, all that you long for, all that you yearn after.

"If God, if liberation, is your top priority, and it fills your heart, mind and intellect—your entire being, and you are consumed by that great longing and yearning—all other wishes come after it, they are secondary, not primary—then nothing in this universe can prevent you from attaining liberation in this very life. This is for sure!

"Let us be practical. Does this mean that one should cease wishing or working for anything else? It is not absolutely necessary, and it is not absolutely possible either. As long as you are in this body, in this earth plane, you have to work for food, clothing and shelter, for the body has its hard demands. You have to keep yourself in reasonable comfort so that your body will not have a breakdown in health and become an obstacle on the path. Because through the body alone you have to live and work out your liberation.

"So, taking care of the body's minimal wants and providing for its shelter—a place to do your *sadhana*, pursue your spiritual practices—is a minimal requirement which no one can afford to totally deny or ignore. If you inwardly give up everything, yet on the outer plane exert to attain what is essential to survive and work out your liberation, then the body does not become an obstacle. Rather, it becomes the boat to cross the ocean of transmigration. It becomes the chariot to take you to your destination along the right road of a divinely lived life. It becomes your instrument for liberation.

"Therefore, view it from this angle. Even the secular can be made part of the spiritual. The outer worldly life becomes a supplementary process to the inner spiritual life. It becomes an inevitable part of it; it becomes one with it.

"So, no part of your life is left outside the purview of your spiritual life. One hundred per cent of your life, twenty-four hours of the day, becomes spiritual if viewed in the right way and lived in the right manner. It becomes an integral part of a comprehensive movement towards God, an ascent towards liberation.

"That's the way Gurudev taught. Have no dichotomy. Make no separation. Feel that all your life is only meant for *sadhana*, for liberation, for an upward ascent towards illumination. If thus, with all your heart, mind and soul, you long for it, let me assure you that liberation is one hundred

per cent certain. No power on earth can prevent you from receiving what you deserve, what you have earned. For, by such a longing, you have earned it.”

A great Teacher, when He was asked what was the greatest commandment of all, answered: “Love the Supreme Being with all your heart, with your entire being. Set aside your little ‘I’, thinking not about yourself, but thinking of and loving Him alone with all your mind and all your heart.”

Then God does not sit in judgment of what you have been. He says, “Here is one who is longing for Me with his entire being.” Then He becomes for you the divine, celestial wish-yielding tree. You go beneath the tree, wish for anything and instantaneously you have it. God is all this and more, and it is such a God that you are worshipping. He is not a judging, punishing, angry, displeased God.

He is the Supreme Reality and He says: “What you wish and long for with all your heart, that is yours. If you ask for Me, I am yours.” This is the real situation between the sincere seeking soul and its maker, support and fulfilment.

24. THE ESSENCE OF ALL SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

The central process, the central practice, the central *sadhana* in all *yogas* is a constant abidance, a constant wakeful abidance, a constant conscious abidance in the goal that you are seeking—which is the Reality.

That which you seek being already part of you, being your innermost Self, that which you seek being the silent, hidden indwelling Reality, the *sarva bhutantaratma* (inner soul of all beings), that which you seek being the imperishable Reality within this perishable body—to be aware of your abidance in It and of Its abidance in you is the central essence of *bhakti*, of *karma yoga*, of meditation, of the path of enquiry and of Vedanta.

A constant abidance in that Reality is the central essence of all *abhyasa*, all *sadhana*. Dwell in God: It liberates us from all sin, from all *ajnana*, *avidya* and from the notion that I have not attained God yet, I have to attain God. If He dwells within you, what is the meaning of saying that I have not attained Him?

If He is far distant, there is a meaning in saying that I have to attain Him, I have to strive, I have to draw nearer, I have to reach and then I can attain. But when we are told and believe that “*isvarah sarvabhutanam hriddese’rjuna tishthati* (God dwells in the heart of all beings, O Arjuna),” when we believe that “within you is hidden God, within you is Immortal Soul, within you is fountain of joy, within you is ocean of bliss, within you dwells the great Reality,” where does the notion come from that He is someone that has to be attained after a long journey, after a long period.

To shed this wrong notion is the one thing needful. To shed this wrong notion look within: “Awareness and consciousness is the centre of my being. In Him I dwell at all times.” In

satchidananda I dwell at all times, is the barest, minimal truth of existence. Everything that exists exists within Him and in everything that exists that Supreme Being exists.

You are the one unique being who can reflect upon this, think upon it, ponder it, meditate upon it and become consciously aware through a purposeful awareness created by constant *manana*, *sadhana* and *abhyasa*. All other forms of life exist without the ability to cognise, pursue and live in a state of radiant awareness. Only the human individual can enter into conscious awareness of this great fact, the central truth of all existence.

In the ultimate context, all *yogas*, all *sadhanas*, all *upasanas*, all practices are meant to accomplish this—to reach a state where all other awarenesses recede, vanish, retreat, and give place to this one central awareness. To abide in this awareness, to continuously abide in this awareness and to keep striving to keep up this constant awareness is *bhakti*, *dhyana*, *jnana*, *upasana*. It is spiritual life.

May the grace of the Divine and the choicest blessings of Holy Master bestow upon all of you this precious gift of abiding in the Reality right now, here, and not in some distant future. Be aware that this is the goal. The goal is already within us. We have to invoke within us this awareness. It is not a linear progression from here to there. It is here, now!

C. TRUTH, NON-INJURY, PURITY

The foundation of all Godward movement—of making our earth-bound consciousness rise upwards towards its original source—is called *dharma*. And the greatest of all *dharma* is to make God your *dharma*.

Follow God. He has expressed Himself in His sacred scriptures and through the messages of His prophets. They may seemingly differ but their messages are non-different and one. The factor that helps us move towards God and attain experience is *dharma*.

And *dharma* is expressed as truthfulness in life. Truth and *dharma* are inseparable; they are two sides of one thing. And truthfulness requires inner strength which comes only from a pure heart that has nothing to fear.

Purity is the guarantee of inner strength. Purity comes by enthroning God in your heart, through feeling His presence within you. It comes by a living inner relationship with Him who you are certain is within you. Such a living relationship is to be cultivated and established through prayer.

Thus these factors are all interrelated. The channelising of our entire life towards the great purpose of existence, God-experience, is possible only through *dharma*. Truthfulness is the essence of *dharma*, and it is only a strong heart and mind that can adhere to truthfulness through all ups and downs and vicissitudes. Such strength comes only through purity, and purity comes through a

living contact and relationship with God by knowing that He is ever established in your heart. And a heart devoid of anything that is contrary to *dharma* becomes the most perfect and suitable seat for God to come and dwell in: “I dwell where *dharma* dwells. I dwell where love for Me dwells.” Thus, let us all strive to make our heart, the inner spiritual heart, worthy of His presence.

25. THE TRUE BASIS OF MORALITY

Worshipful homage to the supreme Cosmic Being who is the one common factor indwelling and interconnecting all living beings and all members of the human family. We may be quite different and diverse in every other way, but there is one common factor and that is the indwelling Reality. “Within you is hidden God. Within you is Immortal Soul.” *Eko devah sarvabhuteshu gudhah* (God, who is one only is hidden in all beings). The same indwelling common factor—Existence-Consciousness-Bliss—makes us all one.

If this is pondered, recognised and gradually grasped as the basis of relating ourselves to seeming others, we discover that there are no others. From the innermost reality of our spiritual being, there are no others in the sense that they are something else other than us or something different with whom we have nothing in common. If we make this the basis of relating ourselves with all living beings and all of God’s creation, then we will live and move in this world as a unifying factor, a cementing force, a harmonising principle.

We are not what we see when we stand before a mirror. We are that which is not seen, that which we feel ourselves to be. And that is the same in all. That Being that makes us all one we call God, the *antaratma* (the Indweller), the One in the many.

This truth is the basis of the good life. It is the real basis of kindness and courtesy. Why should we give respect to others? Because the Being whom we worship and adore is the Being who is the indwelling common consciousness. When we worship Him in the temple or church, how can we show disrespect when He is before us as the living God? That which gives us happiness will also give happiness to others. That which is painful to us will also give pain to others. That which we desire from life around us is the same thing that others desire from life around them.

Therefore, the true basis of morality, goodness, kindness and compassion, being helpful to others, of politeness, courtesy and honesty towards others, is the ultimate spiritual experience which gives us the vision and reveals to us the truth that God is one and He is everywhere. He says: “I come to you in all directions through My own creation. I put before you My creation so that you may never forget Me, that I may never be far from you, I may never be something strange. I am the most familiar thing to you in your life, for you behold Me constantly in all your life, in the whole world. Every day you see Me.”

Gurudev came to open our eyes to this vision. He taught us to see the hidden God in all things and to make that truth the basis of our life and our living. Such a life will be full of reverence for life, of respect for all beings. Out of such a life will come sweet, desirable and beautiful human relationships.

This is the need of our times, the need of the world today. Many people do not know how to behave with each other either individually, collectively or internationally. Our behaviour is unspiritual; we fight and quarrel. For the spirit of religion has gone out of religion. We worship the outer form, and the awareness of the inner content is conspicuous by its absence. Therefore, the world is what it is today.

May we as individual *sadhakas* not commit the same mistake and land in the same predicament. For, although we can do little to change the world, yet we can change ourselves. We can bemoan the world but we cannot change it. However we can do everything to rise from unreality to Reality, from darkness to Light, from mortality to Immortality, from humanity to Divinity. That we can! That we must!

The foundation of all spiritual life is conduct and character, goodness of heart and the purity of one's inner, hidden motivation for actions, speech and thought. No spiritual life or Yoga or Vedanta can stand upon a foundation of bad character, evil thoughts or wrong practices.

26. NEVER ABANDON VIRTUE

The path of wisdom leads one to peace and joy, to one's renowned and good name, unto one's divine perfection and liberation. To be unwise is to take the downward path, to court misfortune and to create one's unhappiness, downfall and ultimate failure in this field of life where one was sent to make effort, to be wise and to succeed.

God's plan for man is ascent unto divine perfection which is inherent, latent, in every human individual because of the fact that the inner, subtle, hidden, essential, true identity of the human being is the God-nature. For the individual soul is part and parcel of the Universal Soul. Therefore, God's plan for man is not sorrow or failure, it is ascent unto perfection, a successful journey culminating in liberation, a transcendence of all sorrow, pain and suffering and an entering into a supernal state of eternal joy and peace.

The wise *sadhaka* always keeps this in his or her mind and proceeds to fulfil God's will in their life by being wise and striving diligently to awaken and unfold the perfection of God that lies within their innermost centre, where one is not man but one is God, where one is not human but one is Divine.

The wise, therefore, pursue the path of virtue, for they know that wisdom lies in the practice of virtue. They know that God Himself coming as Lord Krishna has stated that divine virtues, spiritual graces, lead to liberation, and their contradiction, their opposite, lead to bondage and misery. And to bring this home in a still more forcible manner, He goes on to state that three of the vices—lust, anger and greed—are gateways to hell. They destroy the spiritual nature of man; therefore, they have to be given up.

When the Lord has given us both sides—what leads to a downfall and what leads to liberation—we have to be wise *sadhakas* and throw our weight fully on the side of that which leads

to our own liberation. The path of virtue should never be given up. Even when one is assailed by the greatest temptations, even when one is assailed by the winds of carnal passion, greed, fear or even threat to one's own life, even at the risk of this, the path of virtue should never be given up.

One should ruthlessly abandon all that is the opposite of virtue, all that threatens the path of virtue. No matter how attractive it may appear, no matter how pleasant it may seem, yet there is in it danger like poison. If it is sweet in taste, it does not become less dangerous. It is the same poison; it is lethal; it is fatal; it will kill; and, therefore, it has to be abandoned ruthlessly. Even so, wisdom lies in adhering to the path of virtue, and no cost is too great.

The practice of virtue, a life of virtue, is not just silly sentiment. It is not just a beautiful emotion, a sort of a theoretical, artistic, aesthetic urge in man. Far from it. It is in dead earnest; it is very serious. It is a science. From the point of view of Yoga and Vedanta, it is a science.

It is the adherence to virtue alone that burns up all unspiritual latent impressions in the mind. There is no other means of burning up wrong *samskaras* and *vasanas* except by the fire that is produced by strict adherence to the path of virtue.

Virtue is a purifying force; virtue is a divine power. Just as they say that all *karmas* are burnt by the fire of *jnana*, the fire of transcendental wisdom, even so all unspiritual *samskaras* or *vasanas* are burnt up in the powerful fire of virtue. Virtue is a blazing fiery power that has the possibility of burning up everything that stands in the way of full Divinity.

The practice of virtue is scientific because virtue creates *sattva*, and of the three *gunas* it is *sattva* that has an upward propulsion, a force that lifts one up, makes one take the ascending path. Vedantists insist upon virtue, because it is the one way of going deep within—to the subtlest depths of our being and burning up *asuddha samskaras*. *Raja yoga* prescribes virtue because virtue refines the mind stuff, makes it subtle; and, therefore, one is able to practise concentration which requires a refined and subtle mind. Also, spiritual instructions that are heard or imbibed from *svadhyaya* will only stay in a mind that is subtle, that is pure, that is *sattvic*.

Therefore, it is that they say that one should adhere to the path of virtue. And one should practise virtue as if it is the last chance that one has, as though tomorrow one may die. The pursuit of knowledge should be done with patience, as though one will live a hundred years. Because you cannot imbibe knowledge in a hurry; it is a slow process of evolutionary growth of the understanding and intellect. But the wise person practises virtue as though this is the one and only chance; it is not to be missed. It is to be practised immediately, never postponing it, never hesitating, never allowing any time to pass between a virtuous thought and a virtuous deed.

This is the great necessity. In virtue lies wisdom. In wisdom lies your success in life, your highest welfare. It is the guarantee and assurance of your peace, bliss, illumination, immortality and liberation. Therefore, virtue should never be abandoned, come what may.

The practice of virtue is not something that has to do with morality and ethics only. It has to do with human culture. It has very much to do with spirituality.

27. A CALL TO REBIRTH

A human life, a human birth, is a call to rebirth. “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” So said the great teacher of the Middle East, Jesus Christ, to Nicodemus, the respected ruler and spiritual aspirant, when he came to question Jesus secretly one night. “How can a man be born when he is old?” the confused Nicodemus asked. “Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.”

Water is a universal cleansing and purifying agent. So it means getting rid of *mala* (impurity) and having *chitta suddhi* (purity of mind). You have to emerge as a purified being. That is also the symbol behind baptism—a cleansing of and getting rid of all sin and emerging sinless, spotless, pure.

Fire is also a universal purifying agent. When Sita returned from Lanka she proved her purity by stepping into a roaring fire and emerging unscathed. Not a hair of her head or even her garments were singed by the blaze as her spotless purity was proven.

Our fire ceremony also symbolises a thorough burning away of all dross, of all that is impure, of all that is contrary to Divinity, and an emergence as pure Spirit. This is why it is a symbol of the same rebirth Jesus referred to two thousand years ago.

It is a rebirth from passion to purity; and then from gross earth consciousness, physical consciousness, material consciousness, into a state of spiritual consciousness—a rebirth through the water and the Spirit to emerge as a new being, aware of oneself as connected with the supreme Universal Soul, as a spiritual being beyond time and space, without birth and death, name and form, blemish or impurity, ever pure, ever free, ever full, ever divine—to enter that knowledge, that consciousness, that awareness.

And, thus, it is a rebirth of your very identity, a renewal of your identity, a casting away, a dying to the old self and being born into a new identity where you know of yourself only as related to the Eternal Being, not to this non-eternal world—to the spiritual Reality, not to this gross material phenomenon, this passing phenomenon.

For a spiritual aspirant, there should be a daily rebirth, a daily reemerging into a new awareness, a new higher state of purity—a leaving behind of all that is dross, gross, unspiritual, undivine, not a part of authentic, genuine, one hundred per cent spiritual life, and emerging into a new state of shining purity, shining spirituality, total divinity.

Again and again there should be a rebirth until you become like the Being you wish to attain. You become like Brahman, like the pure divine Cosmic Being, as you were when you abided in Him eternally—being in that status of oneness of God, merging yourself into that Self, partaking of His total purity, partaking of His glorious divine nature.

Thus, each daybreak should constitute a call to rebirth for a discriminating and discerning soul. But what about nightfall? If pondered in depth, it is an even greater call to a rebirth because

even as dawn and daybreak may be an emergence from darkness into light, from inactivity into creative, progressive, fruitful activity, even so, when night falls, it is a turning away from the many, the mere appearance, the carnival, and it is a reentry into the One, which is the substratum, which is deep within. When night falls, the world disappears. You turn away from your involvement and entanglement in this false appearance and you go into the silence of the One without a second.

It is, indeed, a refreshing rebirth into the Spirit, plunging once again into *satchidananda*. It is a turning away from the many towards the One. It is a turning away from the harsh, garish tumult and the demands of the senses and the mind into a silence where there is no longer the din of the demanding senses upon your psyche, much less upon yourself. You return back into your original state to emerge refreshed.

If physical death is a dying, entering into deep sleep is a temporary dying, for it is *everything* that death is except that biologically there may be respiration, circulation etc. Medically you may not be called dead, but psychically you have, at that time, entered into a temporary death. The only difference is that at the ultimate death when you wake up you wake up into another dimension, another plane of consciousness and being, whereas here in this recurring daily death in deep sleep we emerge back into the original setup.

In addition, when you wake up from this temporary death called deep sleep, you wake up into a new reality. If you stand by the bank of the Ganges, each moment you are seeing a new river. You may think you are seeing the same river, but the water you saw a minute ago is now downstream. You are now seeing a totally different river. Even so, every morning you are seeing a different universe, you are in a changed world.

When you wake up in the morning, you wake up in Uttarakhand, in holy Sivananda Ashram, in the pervading presence of Gurudev. You wake up into something very special. This emergence should constitute for you a rebirth into *sadhana*. If there has been slackness in your *sadhana*, in this new birth there should be no more slackness. If there is any pretence in your *sadhana*, there should be no more pretence. If there has been indifference, a sort of half-heartedness in your *sadhana*, there should be no more half-heartedness; you should be in dead earnest, truly serious.

Waking up should constitute a rebirth into divine life, which means a rebirth into total truthfulness. This is the unvarying, invariable condition for the realisation of Reality—to be true to oneself, true with the world, to be honest with oneself and honest with the world. It is a call to divine life in all its unalloyed purity. It is a call to each one of you to truthfulness, to *absolute* purity in conduct and character, to a continuous, almost godly compassion, and a reluctance to hurt or harm anything created by God.

Therefore, may we be reborn not once, not twice, but again and again until there is no longer any necessity or need for any such rebirth or reemergence. Then we are in a state of total Divinity. That is what Gurudev wants each and every one of his followers and devotees to be—total Divinities.

Keep this in your heart and may you become so. You are so! May you know that. You are so, and may you become so, and be so. May you shine with Divinity. May you shine as beings newly endowed with a blazing spiritual consciousness, a radiant spiritual consciousness. God bless you!

28. THE GLORY OF TRUTH, NON-INJURY AND PURITY

(a) Truth

You are seekers after truth and lovers of righteousness. They say *dharma premi*. *Dharma* is righteousness. *Dharma premi* is one who has love for righteousness. The foundation of all righteousness is truth or truthfulness. Character, integrity, truth all mean the same thing. Again and again it has been said: “He who destroys *dharma* is destroyed by *dharma*.” That means that when one destroys *dharma* and becomes unrighteous, his unrighteousness becomes his own undoing. No external force is necessary to give him his deserts. His unrighteousness itself is enough. He becomes the creator of his own perdition, his own suffering, which he has called down upon himself.

But *dharma* protects him who protects it. One who protects *dharma*, that being is protected by *dharma*. Where there is *dharma*, there is ultimate success in all things. This *dharma* is based upon truth. Truth is the supreme *dharma* because God is truth. And we are seekers after truth. It is the entry point to higher life. Truthfulness is the soul of righteousness. The basis of a righteous life, the basis of character is truthfulness. To be truthful, therefore, is the best foundation for supreme success in life. To be a worshipper of truth is the one thing needful.

Truth is the greatest *sadhana*. Truth is the greatest discipline. Truth is the greatest austerity. Truth is the greatest vow and truth is the greatest of all flowers that pleases the Lord Almighty. If He is worshipped with the flower of truth, He becomes extremely gracious, propitiated and showers grace. Truth is, therefore, the great desideratum or the one thing needful—that most desirable of all things. Therefore, ponder truth, meditate upon truth, reflect upon truth, become a worshipper of truth. In this lies your highest good.

In this world, in Kali Yuga (the age of darkness), truth is discarded and therefore suffering comes upon individuals. But one who adheres to truth, practises truth, takes the vow of truth and performs the austerity of truth gets the power to overcome *kali*. The dire influence of darkness is overcome by the light of truth. Truth is the great *tapasya* of this age. It is a great purifier and uplifter, a force that helps the *sadhaka* at every step to overcome all things that stand in his way. Truth is, therefore, a great benefactor. It is the highest good.

Therefore the wise *sadhaka* makes truth his life’s companion. It is the entry point to all higher things. It is the soul of character as well. Therefore, beloved and worshipful Holy Master made it one of the triple principles that he laid down as being indispensably necessary in order to be accepted and to enter into his spiritual family of seekers and *sadhakas*. He said: “Adorned with truth, O seeker after God, come and I shall make you a member of my spiritual family.” We should, therefore, reflect upon the supreme value, the greatness and the need of truth in our spiritual and

secular life. For if your secular life is to be ideal and a support to your spiritual life, then it must harmonise with it by taking into itself truth.

Spirituality is founded upon truth and ethics. A state of divine experience and perfection emerges out of the seed of a good life, out of a moral and ethical idealism in one's life. It does not mean an irrational, illogical or fanatical puritanism. It means a sane and rational ethical idealism, a goodness that arises out of the appreciation of the auspicious, the beautiful and the holy; a goodness, a rectitude of conduct and character, a loftiness of behaviour, a nobility of attitude and approach towards life that comes out of true culture, true education, true understanding.

(b) Non-injury

Spirituality is similarly founded upon a goodness that arises from the understanding that even as I experience and feel so do others experience and feel: "What is distasteful, unfavourable, harmful or undesirable for me, I should not do unto others either by thought or word or action. Others are like me. They have sensitivities. Therefore, they should be given the same consideration which I am always only too ready to give to myself." Thus equating oneself with others and others with oneself, one behaves with a sense of fairness, with a sense of justice, with a sense of consideration, with a sense of feelingfulness and compassion. Such a person never does anything that is likely to be harmful to others, that is likely to destroy the welfare of others, that is likely to go against the highest good of others. This is the essence of humanism.

Lower creatures, subhuman species, have not this feeling of "I am hurting others, I must not." All lower forms of life are so constituted in nature that they feed upon other forms of life. This naturally entails destruction, it entails killing. So the most beautiful bird, with the sweetest voice, will be seemingly heartless. It will suddenly catch hold of an innocent butterfly flying in the air. If the insect is too big or if it flutters, it will hit it with its beak against some hard object and then swallow it. All forms of life other than human are thus constituted, although there are exceptions such as herbivorous animals like the elephant, camel and horse. But with rare exceptions, in nature most forms of life feed on other forms of life. There is no feeling that when I am preying, I am causing harm, giving pain, destroying life. That feeling is absent. In the human being, that feeling is present. That is the essence of the humaneness of the human status.

From the point of view of Vedantic philosophy and Yoga, this is because of spiritual evolution. The human being is an evolved being. Therefore he is capable of compassion, kindness, consideration for other people's feelings and an urge and a desire not to hurt, not to harm, not to cause pain, not to injure, not to destroy life. This has to be developed further until one becomes godly. And the ideal of *ahimsa* (non-injury), the acme, the pinnacle of compassion, *jiva-karunya* was taught by Lord Jesus. He said: "There is no greater love in this human world than that of a person who is prepared to give up his life to save the life of his friend."

It is, however, perfectly possible to be seemingly established in *ahimsa*, never hurting, harming, fighting or quarrelling, but at the same time one may hurt, harm, cause injury and make people suffer through subtle means. In Western society there is a term called "psychological torture." Sometimes it is used in the law courts as the grounds for divorce: "In various subtle ways, upon the mental plane, my partner has tortured me, caused me untold psychological torture by

taunting me, insulting me, making me feel unworthy etc.” In this way, causing anxiety, causing fear and distress, all in a subtle psychological way only, is also against the law of *ahimsa*.

Yoga and the spiritual life demand that violence in all its aspects, harming or injuring in all its forms, be it gross or subtle, manifest or unmanifest, expressed or unexpressed, should be eschewed, should be given up. And Holy Master Swami Sivanandaji went one step further and said: “It is not enough to merely abjure violence, injuring and harming others, whether grossly or subtly, by action or psychologically; on the contrary, one must actively and positively exercise compassion, feelingfulness, mercy, kindness, *daya*, *karuna*.”

For that is our concept of God. He is all-compassion, an ocean of mercy. And all spirituality, all *yoga*, all *sadhana*, ultimately is an earnest attempt to approach God, to return to God, to contact God, to experience God and become established in God. It is a continuous effort to draw nearer to the great, divine, cosmic Universal Being, to enter and experience that Being and make ourselves one with that Supreme Reality. It is an inner mystical process whereby the seeker grows into the God-nature or progressively approaches the ideal of godliness, wishing to become a channel of God’s divinity, to become an expression of all that he conceives God to be, all that he looks for from God.

They call it spiritual alchemy, a slow but sure process of transformation of one’s very being from one’s lesser nature into a sublime higher state of godliness, of the God-nature. It is a slow but steady inner transformation of the being, progressively into the likeness of the Being whom we are trying to attain, whom we are trying to realise. And the more this transformation takes place, the more this inner change towards godliness goes on progressively within, the more one begins to draw closer and nearer to that supreme experience. This is the inner dimension of *yoga*. This ascent towards godliness is the hidden inner form of *yoga*. It is the true *yoga*. It is the very life breath and inner heart of *yoga*. This inner transformation is the subtle unseen content of the life spiritual, *yoga* and the practice of *yoga*.

And this, therefore, requires that we cast out, shed away and remove from ourselves all that is contrary to our concept of the God-nature, all that is other than the God-nature. Everything that does not harmonise with the God-nature can have no place in the spiritual ascent to divine perfection. Anything that does not harmonise with the supreme ideal—the God-nature—logically, rationally, cannot have a place in the life spiritual. To see this clearly does not require any great erudition, philosophy or metaphysical knowledge. You cannot approach light taking darkness with you. When you approach light, darkness has no place.

Truthfulness, compassion and kindness go hand in hand. Because when you are kind and compassionate, you manifest your true nature which is the God-nature, you being part of God. It becomes your authentic life, not contrary to your reality. It becomes your true life. Anything that goes against the God-nature in you—either mentally, verbally or physically—is contrary to your true nature; you are contradicting your truth. Therefore your life becomes based upon falsehood. It is not expressing the truth of your being, your real identity. This is the inner contradiction, dichotomy, that comes about if you do not grow in the spirit of divine compassion and kindness. This is to be understood and grasped. It is to be seen with clarity and practised with determination.

(c)Purity

Similarly also, the Atman or Brahman is *nitya, niranjana, nirmala, suddha sattva*, all that stands for sanctity, spotless purity and holiness. Therefore, at the very outset of *raja yoga* as part of the practice of *niyama*, Maharshi Patanjali wants the spiritual aspirant to strive after a state of inner and outer cleanliness, inner and outer purity. And the classical Vedantic tradition also draws our attention to the three hurdles that stand in the way of illumination or enlightenment, supreme knowledge. They speak of *mala, vikshepa* and *avarana*. *Mala* is impurity. *Vikshepa* is the constant restless nature of the mind and *avarana* is a curtain or veil that hides. So they say: “These three obstacles that stand as barriers between the *jivatma* and the *paramatma*, the seeking soul and the Supreme Being, have to be gradually eliminated or eradicated. They have to be removed.” They say that *sadhana* is removing everything that stands in the way of your realisation of the ever-present Reality.

Gurudev used to put it in a very simple manner: “Purify, concentrate, meditate, realise.” Purify signifies the overcoming of *mala*. Concentrate signifies the overcoming of *vikshepa*. Meditate signifies the method of removing the veil that hides the Reality within, and this leads to realisation.

And they state the impurities of the mind to be carnal passion or impure desire, anger, avarice or greed, delusion and deluded or infatuated attachment, haughtiness or arrogance which is a sign of ego, and envy or jealousy. They are called the six enemies, the six foes, *shadripu*, that stand in the way of attaining wisdom, illumination and liberation—*kama, krodha, lobha, moha, mada* and *matsarya*. And in the Srimad Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna specially and specifically names lust, anger and greed as obstacles, the dire enemies of man. Therefore, they have to be overcome, renounced and eradicated from the human nature. “*Trividham narakasyedam dvaram nasanam atmanah kamah krodhas tatha lobhas tasmad etat trayam tyajet* (Triple is the gate of this hell, destructive of the self—lust, anger and greed; therefore one should abandon these three).”

Therefore, growing in purity—overcoming those factors that represent the basic impurity of the bound soul caught up in *maya* due to negative *samskaras* and *vasanas*—forms an integral part of the preparation for higher spiritual life. One should sincerely, earnestly and diligently try to completely eradicate these negative qualities by slow and patient practice, humility, prayer, *satsanga*, the company of great ones, keeping a lofty ideal for oneself to rise up to, and by basing one’s life upon certain principles.

Self-control becomes an essential part of it. Psychological understanding, daily introspection and self-analysis become a part of it. And a keen and earnest longing for attaining this state of purity becomes an indispensable part of it, a great yearning for becoming an embodiment of purity, a personification of holiness and sanctity. It is this which gives the power and force from within to attain that state of godliness. “Be ye also perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect.”

There should be a positive passion for purity, a great longing to shine with this divine virtue, a determination to be free from all these blemishes and to bring about this transformation. There should be a great love for this life of sanctity, holiness and purity. It is these ingredients only that will act as a strong all-conquering force that will help the seeker and the spiritual aspirant to rise

above all that is gross, all that is *tamasic* and *rajasic*, all that is petty and ignoble, all that is unspiritual or undivine. Knowing that these things are not good for him, he feels: “They may be all right for the millions and billions who are caught up in ignorance and blindness, taking the world to be the one and sole reality and sense enjoyment to be the greatest good fortune, the most desirable thing, but they are not meant for me.” Thus the real aspirant is wakeful, while others slumber not knowing the ideals of higher spiritual living.

It is in a state of wakefulness, *jagriti*, that one has to endow oneself with this shining, radiant quality of divine purity, of God-like holiness of nature. And it requires a little patient working upon oneself, through self-analysis, introspection, prayerfulness, cultivation of holy company, good reading, repetition of the Divine Name and having a lofty ideal for oneself. All these make this inner process of spiritual purification successful.

And if you take a right view of this important *sadhana*, you begin to see that this should be easy for you. It should come spontaneously, because you are the shining embodiment of purity, being the Atman which is ever pure, the *nitya suddha atman*. “I am the Atman, ever pure, part of the divine Cosmic Reality. In me purity abides in all its glory, in all its fullness.”

If you thus identify yourself with your true, essential higher nature, spiritual nature, it becomes a most natural thing to grow in that purity, to manifest it in and through your thought, word and deed. “It is natural for me to be pure, because I am the ever-pure Atman.” If this truth is hammered into the mind, if this truth is affirmed and you identify yourself with your real nature, rather than with that which is not your reality—the temporary limiting adjuncts—then to grow into that nature, to manifest the Reality that you are in thought, word and deed becomes the most natural thing. To rise to the awareness of your sublime spiritual nature and to make your life a spontaneous process of the expression of this nature, is the secret of a true and effective inner life and inner *sadhana*.

The rainbow does not have to perform *sadhana* in order to be colourful. Butter does not have to perform *sadhana* to be soft. Ice does not have to do *sadhana* to be cold. Fire does not have to do *sadhana* to burn and be hot. Sugar and honey do not have to do special *sadhana*—discipline and *yoga*—in order to be sweet. Thus it is: to be what one is, to express one’s unchangeable, essential nature does not require any special science or technique or *sadhana* or practice.

It is necessary to be aware of what you are. Then to express, to manifest, what you are becomes the natural thing to do. This is the secret—the key—for growing in purity and spirituality and making life a glorious ascent towards God-experience, realisation.

May we all be benefited by pondering these truths which are foundational to spiritual life. May we all be benefited and grow in godliness day by day, minute by minute, through every act and through every thought. And let this be something spontaneous. Let this be a matter of joy and giving joy. For to be oneself is the most spontaneous, most joyful thing that one can think of!

“This is a world of pain and death.” It is also said that if you realise God you go beyond all pain, sorrow and death. Therefore, while you are dedicating your entire life, intelligence and energy

to realise God in order to get rid of pain and death, it is elementary common sense that you should not inflict pain upon other living beings.

When your whole life is devoted to avoiding, ultimately transcending and forever liberating yourself from pain, how can you be so thoughtless, so blind as to give pain to other living creatures? It is the height of irrationality. It is inhuman, because it goes against human intelligence. It is completely against the very spirit of your life, the very ideal you are trying to move towards and achieve for your own life.

29. TRUTH

Is there any one thing that can be helpful in making our life God-oriented, in making our thoughts, words and actions helpful, favourable, supporting and assisting our upward ascent towards our glorious, supermundane, cosmic spiritual origin which is our natural state, a state of eternal freedom, fearlessness, perfection, lacking nothing?

Yes, there is one thing that can be actively helpful, a positive assistant, a plus factor in taking us towards the goal, and it is one of the direct ways. That factor is adherence to truthfulness. Truthfulness is God manifest in the human world. God is the great Truth in the dimension, on the plane, of the supermundane spiritual world. Truthfulness is His direct manifestation in this relative plane of this human world.

A person of truth and integrity speedily progresses towards the great goal of God-realisation. Grace will shower and support his sincere aspiration for truth and bless him with success in this great adventure of the Spirit that leads to divine perfection.

If a person has great knowledge, wisdom and talents, if he shines with many abilities and capacities, if with all these endowments he is dishonest, untruthful, then he has a long way to go. God is far, far away from that person's life, because he has removed God from his life.

There is a great popular saying: "In that heart where love abides, there God is; and God dwells not in that heart where love is not." And the same can verily be said about this great virtue of truth: "In that heart where truth abides, there God is. God dwells not in that heart where dwells untruth, falsity, concealment, cheating, dishonesty, hypocrisy, pretence, cunningness and crookedness which are all various shades of *asatya* or untruth."

Our ancients knew the great importance of truth and insisted upon it as a prime value to be practised if one wants to even enter the portals of spiritual life. Bhishma, in the Santi Parva, speaks about the glory, the greatness and the indispensability of truth in the life that would attain God. Sri Ramakrishna again and again used to say: "God loves a guileless nature."

And in our day, this is what worshipful and beloved Gurudev had to say about truth: "There is no religion higher than truth. There is no virtue higher than truth. There is no *dharma* higher than truth. There is no treasure higher than truth. Truth is God. God is truth. Where truth exists,

non-violence also exists. Where there is perfect non-violence there is truth also. Truth and non-violence are the two aspects of the one Reality. Truth is duty. Truth is peace. Truth is *yoga*. Truth is the Absolute. Truth is the supreme refuge. Make prostrations unto truth with great reverence.”

This is what Gurudev had to say about truth. And the greatest prostration we can make unto truth is to practise truth, to manifest truth, to live for truth in our daily life—in our subjective inner life and our objective outer life, in our mental life, our verbal life and active life. This is the greatest prostration, the greatest reverence we can give to truth.

The attainment of the Truth depends upon our practice of truth. One cannot dwell in falsehood and attain to Truth. This is a simple statement of fact. This is self-evident. One should be sincere and earnest and yearn with all one’s being to become an embodiment of truth. Jesus said: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.” Unless we hunger and thirst for something, unless we yearn and long for something, it does not come of itself. It is a plain fact that without pain one does not have any gain. We wish to avoid looking at this truth, this fact; we want all things to come to us by themselves.

We have also to surrender our false ego, our guileful, crooked, cunning nature to the Supreme Being and supplicate Him—whom we regard as our goal, whom we regard as our friend, protector, light, liberator, saviour and redeemer—and say: “Make us walk that path, the path of truth, the path of purity and goodness that will bring down Your grace. Take away from us all that is contrary to this great virtue. Take away from us all untruth, all falsehood, all dishonesty, all double-dealing, all hypocrisy. Remove from us all that is unspiritual, undivine, all that is contrary to Your supreme, all-pure nature. We place ourselves in Your hands. We surrender unto Thee. Remove everything that stands between us, and bless us that we may walk the path that finds favour in Your eyes.”

Let us, therefore, abide by and adhere to the great central law of truthfulness by which we know we shall find our light and the freedom that we seek. Let your life support this great principle, this noble and sublime principle, and let this noble and sublime principle support your life. One is invulnerable if one stands by truth. Truth becomes not only one’s shield, it becomes one’s fortress.

Truth can be all this and more for those who enshrine it, for those who embody it, for those who protect it and support it in and through their lives and actions. This is the greatness of truth. No wonder, for it is God that is manifest as truth.

If we will make ourselves embodiments of That from whom we have our being and who is within us, if we make ourselves a personification of That, then all things will come of themselves. All things will come if we establish ourselves in that great Truth, knowing whom one becomes free!

30. THE FIRST STEP

What should God mean to each and every one of us? What is our relationship with God and God's relationship with us? Scriptures tell us that He is the whole and we are a part. Being all-pervading and indwelling, He is our constant companion. He is our lifelong companion from the moment we draw our first breath until our last breath.

You are never alone. If at all anyone is constantly with you, it is that Being who is called God. He is your lifelong, constant, closest companion. He is a *sakshi*, a constant silent witness. All-knowing, He knows everything about you. He knows you best. He not only knows everything about you and knows you best, He knows even more about you than you yourself know.

Much about yourself is hidden within your mind, memory and subconscious. It is all dark to you; you just do not know. Sometimes, when you suddenly know, you are taken by surprise: "What! Can such a thing be within me? Can such a thing come from within me?" You are taken aback. Because, your interior is mostly in the dark. You don't know; whereas, He knows. There is nothing that He doesn't know.

He knows you totally, and He also tolerates you totally, with all your shortcomings, minus-points, drawbacks, imperfections and insufficiencies. He is the most tolerant of all beings. He is an impartial dispenser of the results of our actions. He Himself is the originator of the law, but He is neither a punisher nor a rewarder. The law fulfils itself.

And what is amazing about Him is that not only does He know all your minus points and tolerate them, He even goes to the extent of not minding them, not counting them against you—simply brushing them aside. Whereas He is keenly aware of all your plus points. He notes them all, takes count of them. They weigh with Him, whereas the minus points do not weigh with Him. He leaves them to us saying that they are our problem—let them solve it.

But, if you turn to Him for help in solving the problem, He is ever ready. Not only is He your constant companion, your silent, ever-patient, ever-tolerant witness, knowing more about you than you yourself know, but He is also your guide, friend and philosopher. He wants to guide you in the right direction. If you will ask Him, turn to Him, listen to Him, He is your greatest friend. He gives you the light of higher understanding.

And what is more, He is the helper of the helpless, ever ready to help if you but turn to Him. Many a times, even if you don't turn to Him, He comes to your help in the form of seeming difficulties, in the form of seeming adverse factors. He comes. His blessings come in disguise. Later on you understand: "What a great blessing that adverse factor was. I asked what is God doing to me, and all the while I did not know that He was trying to help me."

He never abandons the helpless. He never turns away one who approaches Him for help. He is never deaf to our prayers—ever listening to our prayers, ever ready to help, giving us what we seek. He is, therefore, more than a mere lifelong companion. He is a very helpful companion, a very compassionate, understanding and sympathetic companion. All that and more. He confers upon us the highest blessedness.

But He wants us to take the first step towards Him. And the first step towards Him is to recognise that our heart is His dwelling place and that our body is His moving temple. Thus we must keep it worthy, clean, pure. The poet, Rabindranath Tagore, says: “O God, Thou who are the life of my life, I shall ever keep my body pure, knowing that Thy living touch is upon all my limbs. I shall ever keep my heart pure knowing that it is Your royal throne within this body temple.”

This then is His closeness, and knowing this we keep our heart pure. Knowing this we keep out from it all that is contrary to His nature, all that is undivine, all that is unspiritual, not *sattvic*, not holy and sacred. We say: “No, I shall not defile this divine abode of His by allowing anything that is not of the highest quality. For it is my privilege to give Him a worthy place. It is my humble privilege to constantly keep it holy, clean and pure by cleansing it every day, every moment of my life. What am I? What is He? And yet He dwells in me. What a great privilege, great blessedness. What have I done to qualify for this?”

Thus, filled with a sense of awe and gratitude, one does everything possible to keep the inner temple, the sanctum sanctorum, holy, clean and pure. And when, through constant effort and sincerity, through earnestness and great aspiration, the individual devotee, *bhakta*, *sadhaka*, *yogi*, works to keep the heart pure, then in that pure heart the recognition of God’s great worth dawns.

Only a pure heart can recognise the great worth of God, how everything is petty, worthless, before this great One. Then dawns dispassion: “What folly I have been engaged in all these years. God knows for how many births I have been running after these worthless things. What a great folly! Never anymore! Enough!” Thus you turn away from all that is unworthy and seek only Him. So, purification of the heart gives place to devotion and renunciation. And through renunciation one attains the great peace which is God. Immortality comes only through renunciation.

God works by manifesting within us a keen longing for purity. Through purity comes devotion and through devotion comes dispassion, *vairagya*. Through dispassion, through renunciation, comes the Ultimate. One attains immortality and the peace that passeth understanding.

Lord Krishna says to Arjuna: “I’m the indwelling Principle, O Arjuna. I reside in the hearts of all beings.” “I am the eternal within the non-eternal.” “*Yo mam pasyati sarvatra sarvam cha mayi pasyati; tasyaham na pranasyami sa cha me na pranasyati* (He who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, he never becomes separated from Me, nor do I become separated from him).”

These are all direct assertions. There is no intricate philosophy, no concealed or indirect meaning. No one can fail to easily grasp the great truth proclaimed, the central fact of God and His creation, which has been declared so that you can make it the basis of your view of life.

Why is it that though this truth is being read a thousand times, we still do not succeed in maintaining this vision? The answer to this question is given right at the beginning of the eleventh chapter of the Gita. “Arjuna, It is subtler than the subtlest, the subtlest of all things. Your vision is gross.”

“Why is my vision gross?” This is the unasked question of Arjuna. Your vision is gross, because you perceive through a heart where there is not the purity of subtlety or the subtlety of purity. Your vision is gross because you perceive and interpret through a mind which itself is gross. It is not pure, sattvic, spiritual; it is not divine. Purity has not been consciously cultivated.

“If the heart and mind are pure, you will see Me.” When the heart is pure and filled with light, God is perceived everywhere through human sight. God dwells in a pure heart and mind. Therefore, make yourself radiantly pure, immaculate. That is the key. That is the secret.

D. SURE GUARANTEES OF SUCCESS

God’s grace and the *guru*’s blessings are in abundance, I assure you. What more is needed? Sincerity and self-effort. Unless there is a deep desire in you to be saved, to be uplifted, not all the gods of the Hindu pantheon or of any religion will be able to uplift you.

Therefore, you require *mumukshutva*. Unless you have this burning desire for liberation all the other spiritual qualities will be of no avail. You must have a tenacity of spirit, a doggedness, a do or die attitude that you will not compromise with the spiritual quality of your life, you will not budge one inch from the insistence on the total perfection of the spiritual quality of your thoughts, your emotions and sentiments and your actions—your being and doing day by day.

“About that there is no compromise. I stick to the ideal. I refuse to lower it even by a hair’s breadth. I live, move, breathe, eat, drink, sleep, think, feel, act only to attain the great liberation, only to regain my total Self-experience.” And such sincerity and self-effort does not mean absence of humility. When Arjuna declared: “I will act according to Thy word,” he first said, “My delusion is gone through Thy grace, O Krishna.” So we acknowledge our perennial deep debt to God for His graciousness.

But God’s grace and the *guru*’s blessings must be completed by sincerity and self-effort—a sincerity that is always present, never absent, and a constant, unremitting and unceasing self-effort. With these two together, nothing on earth can prevent the seeker from attaining liberation. This is certain! This is the truth and the fact!

31. BE CLEAR ABOUT THE GOAL

Worshipful homage unto the Supreme Reality, the eternal, the unchanging, the ever-enduring *sat*, Existence, that which alone is the Reality!

The path that leads to the realisation of this Reality is the path that gives certainty to life, significance and meaning to existence; it endows one with strength, and then ultimately becomes

the liberator from all error. It provides for the human individual soul a purpose, and purposefulness is the secret of strength; it is strength.

Certainty is strength. Certainty is a power that overcomes all that stands in the way. Uncertainty is weakness that lays one open to all the contrary pulls and pushes that abound everywhere in the phenomenon called life. Uncertainty is like a traveller moving through a jungle unarmed and unprotected or a soldier on a battlefield without his arms.

Certainty endows one with a sense of purpose and a sense of overcoming. It is the strength of a seeker who knows what is to be attained. Because, when the goal is clear, when the path is visible and known, and the direction is definite, then life becomes a powerful movement forward towards the goal. Therefore, it is necessary that we know what we are striving for, that we know what we are seeking and that we have a definite plan and purpose.

There should be no delusion. There should be no confusion. There should be clarity of thought. The Upanishads give us an analogy that Vedantins oft meditate upon and that *jijnasus oft contemplate: pranavo dhanuh saro hi atma brahma tallakshyam uchyate apramattena veddhavyam saravat tanmayo bhavet* (Om is the bow. The individual self is the arrow. Brahman is the target. The target is to be hit by great vigilance. Then alone shall one merge into Brahman, even as an arrow enters into a target).

The key word here is *apramatta* (careful, watchful, vigilant). A person who has no delusions—who has no confusion, who is very clear and definite about what he has made up his mind to reach—has no lack of clarity; he has no uncertainty; there is not the least doubt in his mind. He is sure. He has chosen after great thought; so, there is no hesitation. There is a total integration of all his being towards that self-chosen goal. Every *bhakta*, every *jijnasu*, every *yogi*, every Vedantin, every *sadhaka* has to be *apramatta*. He has to attain that state where there is no doubt left.

The verse says that you yourself are the arrow. You have to speed straight, unerringly towards the target that you have set for yourself, moving in that one, unified, single direction towards the Goal Supreme, towards that divine destiny that you have known to be the one and only thing that imparts meaning to life, that makes life worthwhile, that gives significance to life. Having no more doubt about the destination to be reached, you make yourself like unto an arrow that speeds straight towards the target.

And what is it that impels you? What is it that impels an arrow forward? It is the bow, and what is that bow that impels you, that gives force? It is none other than that one mystical symbol, the *pranava*, Om. Om signifies or betokens an alert state of inner spiritual wakefulness, an ever-awake spirituality. Whether the body is in its wakeful condition, dream or deep sleep, you are ever awake spiritually. For you there is no sleep; you are alert, ever awake.

And it is this ever-awake condition of spiritual awareness that will guarantee the straight, onward flight of the arrow, meaning yourself, towards your target which is Brahman, God-experience, Self-realisation, illumination, bliss beyond all sorrow. That is the target, the objective, and you have to reach that, enter into and become one with that supreme target.

That is possible only if there is no uncertainty, no vacillation, no confusion, no hesitation: “I have known what it is that I aspire after, long for, wish for in this my life. Having pondered it well, weighed the pros and cons, deeply reflected, and having seen what this world is, known its hollowness, its absolute pettiness, its purely evanescent nature where everything is transitory and subject to decay and dissolution, I have turned away, I have now known what there is to be attained.

“Having known that in this pettiness and nothingness there is no great significance, except that in and through this wilderness I can attain that state of everlasting light and blessedness, I gather together all my energies, all my potential, my entire life, and readily, willingly, gladly, with great enthusiasm, zest and zeal I dedicate myself for this great attainment.

“This is what I am. That is what my life constitutes— the flight of this sharp arrow, speeding from the bow towards the target. That is what my life is; that is how I conceive it. I clearly see my life to be this speeding arrow going unerringly in the direction of the Supreme Goal, which is nothing less than Brahmanhood, God-experience.”

Thus clearly knowing oneself and knowing what one’s life is, one should speed on towards that great Goal. That is the essence of the moment by moment, day-to-day life of the true seeker, the classic *yogi*. He is ever intent upon this achievement. And everything has meaning for such a being only with reference to this great quest and attainment. If it is not relevant to that great attainment, then that thing ceases to have any place in the true seeker’s life.

This is the life triumphant. This is an effective life. This is a life where uncertainty is minimal and purposefulness is maximum. Such a life alone is a life that makes one thrive and gives joy, satisfaction and great inspiration!

This needs to be considered in relation to one’s life. Does my life have a definite purposefulness, a clear-cut goal? Have I set my direction? Have I adopted a set of principles that will help me move in this direction? And finally, have I an ideal which inherently contains within itself all these three?

32. DEVELOPING A LONGING FOR GOD

Worshipful homage unto the omnipresent Divine from whom we are never apart, in whom we dwell and who dwells within us as the very life of our life, the eye of our eye, the ear of our ear, the breath of our breath, the *prana* of our *prana*, the mind of our mind, the very heart of our heart, the innermost essence of our being!

“*Eko devah sarvabhuteshu gudhah...*” “*Isvarah sarvabhutanam hriddese’rjuna tishthati...*”—The Supreme Spirit is hidden in all beings. The Lord, Isvara, dwells in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna. Thus, variously, the scriptures again and again bring to our attention this truth, this fact, that we are never apart from, we are never in any way remote, distant or disconnected from, the Being whom we are seeking, the Being whom we refer to as the *parama lakshya*, highest goal, of human existence.

When we say *parama*, highest or supreme, we always think of it as something beyond, something distant or remote, something that requires a long journey to reach. We always think in terms of a long process, but they point out to us that it is an inner journey. We do not have to cover distances. We only have to remove obstacles—formidable obstacles within ourselves—the greatest obstacle being ourselves. And, metaphysically speaking, the lesser obstacles are certain factors within our own personality that are contrary to the Divine Reality, which, therefore, veil It. They stand in the way, they obscure It; they obstruct our perception of It, our experience of It.

Also, the inveterate tendency of our psychological self is to always move away from the inner centre and move outside to external objects, propelled by the desire for the possession and enjoyment of external things. It is the tendency of the mind to imagine that happiness, peace and the fulfilment of our lives lies in striving for, possessing and experiencing external things, and thus it moves outward in the wrong direction due to this wrong notion. Therefore, the most familiar, the most intimate appears to be remote. Not that it is, but we make it so.

To alter these outgoing tendencies—this deluded thinking of the mind that our happiness is in worldly possessions, contacts, and experiences—becomes an indispensable part of our *sadhana*. And it is an extraordinary quality of this delusion that it doesn't allow the deluded being to perceive that he is deluded. On the contrary, he will argue and fight and try to convince others that he is perfectly clear, rational and logical.

So, all the world is in the grip of this delusion that does not permit them to know their delusion; on the contrary, makes them convinced that they are right and that those who do not think like them are deluded. Thus it is that this *bhranti*, this delusion, being created by *maya* makes the being move in a direction contrary to his ultimate goal which is within. It is through *satsanga* and *svadhyaya* that this delusion is removed and ignorance is replaced by right understanding and knowledge. That marks the turning of our direction towards God.

We must come to the conviction, the continuous, unalterable conviction that God is present right here, nearest to me as my innermost being. God lives within me; we are never apart. And the next conviction is to know that this Being is the only source of true happiness, peace and satisfaction. There is no other source.

The third conviction is that this Being, who is ultimately the only source of true happiness, is, therefore, the highest value in life. There is nothing greater, nothing more valuable, nothing more important.

If we make seeking Him our most important task in life, if we develop for Him a great longing, a great desire and an overwhelming yearning: “In this life, before I pass away, I must attain God, I must experience that Supreme Being, I must,” if our whole being becomes filled with this urge, then there is absolutely no doubt, it is absolutely certain, that in this very life, in and through this very body, God will be experienced. There is no room for doubt or despair.

No matter how deluded the world outside may be, no matter how chaotic and absurd, no matter how outrageously human society in this world may be acting, it does not matter if your interior is all right. And it is in the firm conviction of God's existence and in His most intimate and

nearest presence, plus a great conviction that He is the one and only supreme value, the one and only thing worth attaining that you develop within you a great longing to attain and experience God; in fact you become of the nature of God.

Then you may be absolutely certain that nothing can deprive you of that experience. It may be a question of a little sooner or later, but the experience is certain. There is no doubt about it.

Let us, therefore, adore the Supreme by acknowledging His immediate, indwelling presence and by telling Him: “Thou art my all in all. Thou art everything for me. Thy attainment is my life’s only desire.”

33. SUSTAINED ENTHUSIASM

Worshipful homage unto the eternal, infinite, all-pervading, supreme, non-dual Reality, the one alone that exists and whose existence manifests as existence in all things that exist.

The ocean exists. Therefore, waves exist. If there were no ocean, there would be no waves. The central orb of the solar radiance exists, and billions of rays radiate in all directions. If the sun did not exist, there would be no light. There would not be one single ray in this universe of ours. Even so, the existence of all things that exist cannot be separated, cannot even be conceived of, as distinct and separate from the one, ultimate, supreme, non-dual source of all existence, that which is Existence Absolute, *sat*.

Thus, all existence owes its existence to that supreme *sat*, to that Supreme Being, to that One alone that exists eternally, beginninglessly, endlessly. To that Supreme Existence which is the beginning, middle and end, the alpha and omega of all that exists, our worshipful homage!

Loving adorations to the spiritual presence of worshipful and beloved Holy Master Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji, who thought it fit to impart such insights to sincere seeking souls, to *sadhakas* with *jijnasa* (the desire to know), to *sadhakas* with *grahanasilata*, the willingness and readiness to receive. For this is essential: the willingness to approach, the willingness to ask for knowledge, and the willingness to receive.

Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. So, this is the condition preceding any achievement. There should be eagerness to receive. There should be desire to know. There should be willingness to fulfil all conditions, so that it may be bestowed and so that it may be received. This is the essence of the quest and its successful, fruitful culmination—a continuous eagerness to obtain, and a great willingness to fulfil the conditions so that it may be bestowed. Plus, the patience to work for it and to bide one’s time.

Therefore a *sadhaka* is called a *jijnasu*; he has a keen desire for knowledge. There should be this thirst; there should be this longing. There should be this continuous, keen eagerness to know and to proceed towards the state of illumination, of enlightenment. In other words, to go on

fulfilling all the minimal conditions that are essential for being a ripe receptacle. They say that you must be an *adhikari*, you must be a deserving one.

And if one is to keep up this longing, this keenness, this eagerness, one must have sustained enthusiasm. If you allow your interest to flag, enthusiasm will wane, and you will be in danger. Otherwise, where there is this keen enthusiasm and there is keen interest and eagerness, that itself is an armour, that itself is a power generator that can confront anything, overcome anything, ward off anything.

Therefore it is that a genuine, authentic positivism is an indispensable requisite of successful spiritual striving and ultimate attainment—a keen positivism that looks at the positive aspects of things and exults that God has been so gracious, that rejoicingly moves forward with enthusiasm, with interest, with eagerness, longing for nothing else, wishing for nothing else, caring for nothing else, and paying attention to nothing else but this central quest.

This indeed is the sure guarantor, that which ensures the successful culmination of the spiritual quest, the successful fruition of spiritual *sadhana*, the successful attainment of enlightenment and illumination. Be this so in the life of each and everyone of you!

34. TODAY MOVE ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

What one ardently aspires after, what one has one's heart and mind set upon, and for achieving which one lives, breathes, strives, thinks and feels—if thus one's entire life means a calm but a firm and determined movement towards the supreme goal that one wants to achieve; if the attainment of that goal is the paramount value in life; if, more than anything else, the entire love of one's heart is set upon that goal; if day and night one's mind is ever engaged in finding ways and means of drawing nearer and nearer to that goal—then nothing in this world can stop us from moving towards that goal and ultimately reaching it, provided that while we are moving in that direction, we are always vigilant and careful to see that no part of us moves in a contrary direction.

There is a very descriptive expression in the English language: “back to square one.” It comes from a game, and means that after having made a lot of effort and progress, if you suddenly make a wrong move, then you find yourself right back at the beginning—back to square one.

In several mountain areas of India, the means of transportation is by a very narrow gauge railway. And the interesting feature about this railway is that on the steep inclines there is a third rail between the normal ones which is notched with a series of teeth—cogs. Each car also has a third wheel with similar cogs. On steep inclines, where the train might slip backwards, the third wheel is let down in order to catch hold of and grip the central rail. It is designed to prevent any possibility of the train backsliding.

Now you have a clear idea of what you must do. Not only should you strive to move towards the Goal, but, simultaneously, you must also have a mechanism within your own psyche. It should be a device wisely formulated by you through your own wisdom, common sense and intelligence,

by drawing guidance from all sources of wisdom such as *svadhyaya*, *satsanga* and listening to elders, through reflection, discrimination and enquiry. You make a device so that as you are progressing and moving towards the Goal, you ensure that there is no possibility of sliding back, what to say of back to square one. Back to square one is eliminated altogether. It is impossible. On the contrary, you ensure yourself against even a little reversal, a little backsliding.

It should all be onward, upward, goalward, Godward, with no possibility of deviation, no possibility of derailment, no possibility of slipping down even one little bit. That is why the Lord said that together with *abhyasa* (practice) you must keep on developing and increasing *vairagya* (dispassion). *Abhyasa* should get valiant, effective and powerful support from *vairagya*: “I will see to it that I am on guard, awake, alert, vigilant and dynamically engaged in seeing that the movement is ever in one direction only and not in a contrary direction.”

This is the fruit of effort. This is the fruit of ardent yearning, strong longing and a very great sustained enthusiasm and determination that thus my life shall be and not otherwise. It seems to be a great task. It is a great task, yet it is not a great task. You can reduce it to a simple, possible and not very difficult task. How?

God in His great wisdom, love and compassion has so made it that your life, this long journey towards immortality and divine perfection, is rationed out to you only in tiny sections of little, individual days. Each section is a very limited time period relieved by periods of restfulness, recuperation and renewal. You are only required to attend to one section at a time, not all of life at once.

Therefore, you only contend with one day at a time. You make up your mind: “Today is going to be a divine day. Today is going to be a God-oriented movement. Today is going to be a day in which I’m going to be a perfect replica of God who is my Father, in whose image I am made. He is divine, and so am I. Divinity will infill every moment of this day. This day—that is sufficient. I will attend to making this day a perfect day. I’ll attempt, by every means possible, to make this day a grand symphony.

“I will attempt this with all my sincerity, with all my honesty, with all my earnestness and with all the powers of my being. I will revel in it. I will rejoice in it, I will exult in trying to make this day a thing of beauty and joy for all—within a joy for me, without a joy for others—for it will bring out all that is auspicious, blessed, bright, beautiful, divine.” Thus bring to bear your entire powers, all your sincerity, all your earnestness and all your enthusiasm. That’s all you’re required to do.

It is not to think of spiritual life in terms of whole years or long periods, of a great struggle or a big journey. Nothing, nothing, nothing! You are only expected to attend to the day that has dawned and that is in your hands. Look to it, make it perfectly spiritual, sublime, noble! Then you have a golden key to success in a simple, easy, nevertheless, unyielding, effective way.

This is the secret. This is within the possibility of everyone. Strive with all your might just for this one day—the gift of God, today. God bless you in this effort!

35. HOW GURUDEV BECAME WHAT HE WAS

Gurudev was an extraordinary combination of selflessness, service, devotion, divine love, prayer and worship; an extraordinary combination of discipline, self-control, conquest of the mind, concentration and deep meditation. He was also an expert *hatha yogi*, a great *tapasvi* and a singer of the Divine Name. Combining all methods, he shone as a *bhakta*, a *jnani*, a super *karma yogi* and as one who had mastered his mind—a *raja yogi*. How did this happen? What did he do?

He was like any other person. He was educated in English medium schools, studied medicine, plied his profession in Malaysia, had a progressive, successful career. What is it that he did that made him a world figure, and today we are reaping the benefits of his achievements, his strenuous practice of the spiritual life, his deep meditation, his realisation? Hundreds and thousands throughout India and the world over have been the beneficiaries of his life and his teachings.

What is it that he did? He was given something by God, and he put it to the best of use. He carefully cultivated it. In the thirteenth chapter of the Gita, Lord Krishna makes a significant statement to Arjuna: “This body is known as the field.” A field is a place, an area, which has a potential to produce, to bring forth, to give you a certain harvest. If you labour, if you do the needful to arouse this potential, to activate its ability to produce, then it will bring forth many useful things.

By what means does a person with a certain area of land arouse its potential, make it capable of producing? If it is left as it is, if it is denied water and care, it will produce nothing, even if it has been sown with seeds likely to produce a rich harvest. They will simply dry up. But if water is applied to the field a miracle happens. It not only activates the potential of the field to produce, but it does the same to the seed, the other factor that is involved.

This means that we have to have a deep desire, *subheccha*, to put whatever we have been granted to the highest use, to do all that is necessary—unreservedly, without hesitation, without laziness or lethargy—to labour hard, to provide it with that triggering factor, and to do all that is necessary to bring out what it is capable of bringing out. And this body, this human personality is a field capable of producing a rich golden harvest provided we diligently work upon it and put to the highest and best use whatever it has received.

This should be our objective. But then, we must be fully aware of one significant fact about this field which our body, mind, intellect and personality constitute and that is that it is neutral, it is amoral. It is neither good nor bad, neither *daivic nor asuric*. It is there. It has potential to produce. What this potential for producing will give you depends upon what you put into it, how you utilise it, the way in which you deal with it, the way you activate it. It is like your echo. Whatever you call out, good or bad, comes back to you. Whatever you create is what you have.

The field is there to produce and give you whatever you work for. You are the captain of the ship of your life. You are the master of your fate. You are the creator of your destiny. In the present, you create the quality of your future. What are you presently engaged in? What is the quality of your secret thoughts, seemingly unknown, but known to the Being who indwells you? He knows what you yourself do not know.

Your future, your destiny, what you produce for yourself and others, depends upon the quality of your hidden thoughts—hidden from men but not from God—your various sentiments and motivations and the various attitudes you cultivate towards the world and the things and beings that are in the world around you. These are the prolific creators of your now and your tomorrow. They can make you happy or miserable. They can create within you light or darkness, heaven or hell. For the field is there to give you whatever you produce out of it, depending upon the way that you deal with it.

Therefore, be wise. Be aware of this fact. Beware of its misuse. Put it to the highest use. Be your own greatest benefactor. May your right labours, in the right direction, with the right intention and the right objective be your own greatest benediction, your own greatest blessing.

Out of this, may immense good come to everyone with whom your life has to be lived, and may immense glory, bliss, peace and illumination accrue to you in the days ahead. Think deeply. Decide. How will you work? In what way will you labour? What will you bring forth from this field that God has given you? This the field cannot decide. It is the one that labours there that has to decide.

If you make the right use of this field of the human personality—the body as well as the psyche—for the good of all, the happiness of all, and for your own highest, supreme blessedness, then there is no power on earth that can deny you what is due to you, that can prevent you from getting what you have worked for.

36. DO YOU HAVE A SENSE OF URGENCY?

The life of the Spirit, the life of *sadhana*, the life of laying by eternal treasures as distinct from perishable trifles, was brought home with full force and significance by the admonition of Jesus, the divine teacher of the Middle East, in the form of a query: “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his spiritual life?” This was one of the great questions put before global mankind for all times. It places before each human individual a criterion to measure things, a measuring rod.

Similarly, Adi Sankaracharya in a very descriptive manner brings out more or less the same truth in the last line of each verse of his Guru Paduka Stotra: “You may have the wealth of the whole world, everything that can ever be desired, but of what use is it if your entire mind and heart is not totally absorbed in God and in following your spiritual teacher?”

This, indeed, is something that one should seriously consider. What are we engaged in? Are we engaged in laying by eternal treasures, or are we engaged in gathering trifles as life hurries past like a fast flowing river? Gurudev put it in his way: “Life is short, time is fleeting.” With each incoming and outgoing breath, the allotted life span of each *jivatman*'s residence in this earthly body is fast being depleted.

Therefore, the Upanishadic call: *uttishthata jagrata prapya varan nibodhata* (Arise, awake, having reached the wise become enlightened). This call should be ringing in the ear of every true aspiring soul, every real seeker, every *sadhaka* worth the name of *sadhaka*. Then alone some achievement is possible—not in indifference, not in *pramada* (heedlessness).

Admonitions are not lacking. Saints, sages, *siddhas*, *mahapurushas*, scriptures, *srutis*, *smritis*, *puranas* all sound this call. They all give this caution; they all warn us: Before you know it, time will fly away. “*Dinamapi rajani sayam pratah sisiravasantau punarayatah; kalah kridati gacchatyayus tadapi na munchatyasavayuh* (Day and night, morning and evening, autumn and spring, come and go again and again. While time plays, our life ebbs away. Yet, alas, the wind of man’s vain desires does not cease but continues to blow unsatiated).” Every day this *sloka* must be sounding again and again in your heart.

Many years ago, to make us understand with what keenness, with what great sense of urgency one should engage in practical spiritual life, Gurudev wrote: “When your house is on fire, how courageously, how daringly, without caring for anything, you will plunge into the house and rescue that which is precious.” And here what you have to rescue is your own *nija svarupa* (true nature) from the clutches of desire and *maya*.

These great teachings should not go to waste. Are they all to be cries in the wilderness? Are they to be in vain? They will all be in vain if our mind is only intent upon petty sense pleasures. In his *Gitanjali*, Rabindranath Tagore compares this to children playing upon the shores of the sea of life, gathering shells, building sandcastles, and never thinking of the invaluable pearls that lie in the depth. And what will happen at the end of the day? The shells will be left and the sandcastles swept away by the tide.

Will your life be like that? Will you spend your whole life in puerility, childishness, running after petty things? Consider this! Answer! What is your response to the great question: “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his spiritual life?” What is your answer? Are we responding?

When someone strikes the hour in the Bhajan Hall verandah, does your heart tremble? One more hour has gone; my life has become depleted. Do you even hear the bells, let alone ponder over it, reflect over it? So much is our *pramada*, so much is our preoccupation with little things that we do not know what is happening. We are not aware. We do not know that days are passing, that with each sunset one more day has gone.

Our perception is gross, full of *tamas* and useless *rajas*. It is so gross that we do not perceive that which is right in front of us. We do not perceive the inner implication of things. Life bypasses us, its meaning lost on us. Could there be a greater tragedy, greater blunder, greater loss, greater folly than to neglect this golden opportunity, this rare chance that God has offered us? Who will be to blame if we throw away what God has given to us for petty trifles?

The one time Jesus demonstrated anger was when He entered the temple and saw traders and money-changers there. He made a whip and drove them out saying: “My Father’s house is meant to be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers.” Are you doing that to your

own body-temple where the Father is enshrined? Are you doing similarly—taking a strong stand and driving out from this moving temple of the living God all that is unworthy of His presence?

Are you doing that? Are you doing this cleansing? Have you got that spirit within you? God forgive us if we reject the great gift that He has given to us out of His infinite love and compassion. Regret will be of no avail if we allow life to pass away not understanding its value, not caring to utilise this gift of God.

Let that not be your fate: to live in folly and regret at the end. Therefore, heed the call to “Arise, awake, become enlightened.” There is no other way of proving your worth, proving your mettle, proving what stuff you are made of. Are you made of steel or made of straw?

If we call ourselves *sadhakas*, spiritual people, if we really believe that we are children of Immortality, *amritasya putrah*, then it should be proved by the doing—by our living—not just with our lips.

Life does not stand still. If you grasp time by the forelock and utilise it, it is yours. Otherwise, it is not yours; it is finished. Life is not a thing to be idled away, to be allowed to go by in daydreaming and fanciful imaginations. It is something to be grasped with both hands and utilised.

Understand this very clearly. Then alone you will be the builder of a glorious future for yourself. Then alone you will be the designer of your highest welfare. May God help you do it! May Gurudev’s perennial inspiration enable you to progress higher, upward and Godward day by day!

37. BELIEF, FAITH, BEING AND DOING

When food is withdrawn from our physical bodies, strength decreases, one feels weak, one is unable to exert. If food is stopped beyond a certain limit of time, starvation ensues. And if food is further withheld, starvation leads to death. But then, a person can fall ill, lose weight and become weak even when he is provided with the most nourishing food if he cannot digest and assimilate it. Even if his stomach can digest the food, if due to a diseased condition his intestines cannot assimilate it or absorb it, he will slowly starve unless he is fed through the veins. So, the essence of sustaining yourself physically by physical food lies in your ability to assimilate, to absorb, to take in and utilise the food that is given.

Similarly, our life, our strength, our progress day by day, the enhanced conditions of our inner faculties of mind—memory, thought, intelligence, rationality, psychological development—through *vichara* and *viveka*, enquiry and discrimination etc., depend upon what we are actually able to absorb, what we actually assimilate into ourselves. And what we take in that makes for gradual growth in our personality, our wisdom, our deep understanding of life, our becoming sensitively aware of certain insights in life pertaining to ourselves and the world around us—the nature of things and people, of human relationships, of what should be and what should not be—all depends upon how much we are able to absorb and assimilate.

It is not without reason that our ancients reiterated again and again: “You must not only hear and read, but you must reflect. You must not only hear, read and reflect, but you should deeply meditate and understand. You must not only hear, read, reflect, meditate and understand, but it should become your *svabhava*, your own. You must become that.”

In the Gita it says: “A person is what he believes in.” And the key to this process of successfully assimilating from whatever you learn and becoming what you assimilate is in believing in what you want to become. Have firm and deep belief: “I believe, and I know I will be what I believe. I will become what I believe because that is the truth. And, if I do believe, it will certainly transform me into what I wish to become and believe in.”

So, faith and belief are the twin wings, as it were, of the bird of your spirit. Faith and belief are the two legs that have to take you to your destination. Faith and belief are the left and right hands that can enable you to achieve anything, take up any task and do it. Faith and belief are like the two eyes that enable a person to see correctly, wholly, with the right perspective. Faith and belief are the indispensable twin factors that succeed in making you what you wish to become—deep faith, deep belief.

Again and again you should keep the company of those in whose company your faith increases, your beliefs become confirmed, unshaken, they become firmly established within you, and you become firmly established in what you believe. Then, with deep faith and belief and being what you believe in, striving your very best to actualise it in life so that it becomes your *svabhava*, it becomes your very nature. You become that.

Translate what you are into your daily activity. Never put much interval between what you have become due to your firm faith and belief and acting it out. What you are, that you must do. Otherwise, a condition will arise when faith, belief and what you have become due to faith and belief becomes a static condition, not a dynamic and progressive condition. There is stagnation, arrested movement, no action. You get stuck. If you maintain the status quo having attained the highest and ultimate, it is all right, it is in the fitness of things. But, if you maintain the status quo in the middle of the way, you deprive yourself of the supreme, crowning glory of the highest attainment and achievement.

Therefore, examine yourself, and keep on examining yourself, ruthlessly: Are all these ingredients actively operating within you, namely, deep belief, firm faith, becoming what you believe in, and translating what you are into living, into doing, into a dynamic expression of what you are by constantly, actively manifesting it, expressing it in every detail of your day-to-day living?

Backed up by firm faith and a living belief, being and doing will take you to the Goal, to the supreme consummation of your life. It can make you one with the Cosmic Being. Therefore, the ingredients of sure, gradual success and attainment lie in these four: belief, faith, becoming what you believe and have faith in, and living and doing that which you are—*sraddha*, *visvasa*, *svabhava*, *abhyasa*, belief, faith, being and doing.

Most problems for a seeker are due to negligence rather than willfulness, error rather than sin, weakness rather than wickedness, foolishness rather than wantonness, as well as a lack of vigilance and laxity in maintaining a certain minimal level of spiritual tone in one's thinking, feeling and living. Therefore, it is necessary to keep oneself keyed up to a certain condition of inner tension—tension in the positive and desirable sense of the term, not in the negative sense. And this essential tension is called *tapasya*; it is called determination; it is called resoluteness.

Therefore, go on progressing forward, onward, Godward, towards perfection and liberation, always trusting in God, depending on Him, but, nevertheless, exerting with all heart, determination, resoluteness and keen interest.

38. EFFORT LINKED WITH FAITH

Spiritual life, spiritual striving, spiritual practice, Yoga, Vedanta and *sadhana* all constitute a science, an exact science as much as any physical science upon the outer field of this material universe. Just as the outer field of the material universe follows certain precise patterns which invariably follow exact laws, so upon the inner field of the spiritual universe all things move in a predictable manner according to precise laws.

All attainment, all achievement is the result of effort put forth in a suitable manner in a direction where the object desired is attainable, not in any other direction. If a water diviner tells a farmer to dig for water in a certain spot, then the procedure is always to dig vertically, straight down. They do not dig in any other direction. It is done precisely, geometrically, correctly. And it is such digging that yields water. If, instead, one digs at an angle one may go down hundreds of feet but one will miss the water indicated by the water diviner.

This is the importance of direction. Misdirected energy, misdirected effort would achieve certain results, but not the desired result. It will not get you what you are looking for, what you want. You will get a lot of excavated earth and it will get you to some depth, but you will not gain the desired fruit. Something else might be had, but not what you are seeking for.

Even so, spiritual science is a precise science where effort has to be put forth in the right direction. It is an exact scientific process, but only it is a divine science. It is a science that transcends time, space, here, there, now, then, and name and form, because it is the quest after the timeless, the eternal. It is the quest after the spaceless, infinite, boundless, limitless, immeasurable; but, nevertheless, it is an exact science, a transcendental science.

The Upanishads call it *para vidya*, a science of that which transcends all the known norms, all relativity. Nevertheless, it is a science where when certain conditions are fulfilled, where effort is in the right direction and where one never loses sight of what one wants, the results are as precise and predictable as in any field of the outer, material universe.

And, one should also recognise well that one must persevere. No scientific discovery was made with a single attempt. A harvest of grain is not produced in a single day. No fruit appears on a

tree before its time. So, with patience one has to persevere in putting forth the needed effort. This is wisdom. Impatience is a lack of understanding that in a science things work in a precise manner. Therefore, in this science no effort is ever wasted, no effort is in vain, no effort is futile. Every bit of effort put forth adds on to all the effort that has gone before.

Therefore the saying: “Pray and also work.” Go on working, go on praying patiently. Your work will guarantee and ensure that your prayer comes true. And your prayer assures and guarantees that you will not stop midway in your work. It infills you with a force, a feeling, an urge, a drive. Because prayer believes and work achieves.

It is the force of this faith, this belief, that makes the work authentic, genuine, effective and fruitful. They cannot be divorced. They mutually supplement and support each other. It is an art and a science.

Faith, trust and devotion are an art, an inner state, a state that is a manifestation of that within you which is already divine. And effort, *sadhana*, is a science that may seemingly be undivine. It is through the body, the mind, the intellect, the emotions, through certain techniques and processes. It seems to be very much on this relative plane. But when linked together with this inner divine force, the principle of faith, *sraddha*, knowledge is obtained. *Sraddhavan labhate jnanam* (The man who is full of faith obtains knowledge).

What a person believes in, that verily that person is, that verily constitutes the personality of the person. This is a declaration in the Gita regarding this faith, the inner state of calmly and firmly believing in the objective of your life. Thus linked together—prayer with faith, and effort with resolution and calm, patient perseverance—they bring about seeming miracles. Perseverance and patience are required because as in any other science, things take their own time.

Thus, the wise *sadhaka*, the earnest seeker, understanding that the divine science is also a science governed by precise laws and conditions which if fulfilled yield results, is never perturbed and never gives up. Calmly, patiently, perseveringly and continuously one keeps up the effort that leads to realisation. Thus, one should relate oneself to this divine science as a person of faith and a person who is a *yogi*. Because, the hallmark of *yoga* is *abhyasa*; repeated, continuous effort is the inner *svarupa* of *yoga*.

Let us reflect well upon these facts and truths about our spiritual life and become the fortunate few who reach the Goal. It is those that keep on struggling upwards that reach the peak of the mountain, not those who keep on looking back at the distance already climbed. That is irrelevant. Those who keep looking ahead at the ever-shortening distance between themselves and the peak climb and attain the Goal. They say: “I am drawing nearer. The peak is closer to me now.” This is the vision that grants fulfilment.

39. HE IS YOUR GUIDE, FRIEND AND PHILOSOPHER

Worshipful homage to the supreme, eternal, cosmic Divine Spirit, who is our goal ultimate, who is the inner, silent, invisible director of all things—including our own life. May we recognise that this silent inner director is not only our eternal companion in life, but He is also an ever-present silent witness, who knows all things, who fathoms the innermost hidden recesses of our being—our mind, our intellect and the thoughts, memories, sentiments, emotions, fears, anxieties, uncertainties, inner motivations and the pride and prejudices that lurk within.

He is a silent witness to our entire psyche. Nothing is left out. Nothing is hidden from Him. Therefore, we should acquit ourselves in a worthy manner before His all-seeing gaze and His all-knowing cosmic divine intelligence. However, this does not mean that He is an entity to be feared and that we should always live in constant distress: “Oh, I have done this, I have thought that, and He already knows it.” Because, at the same time, He is also your guide, friend and philosopher, ever ready to give you advice, ever ready to help you find the right direction, ever ready to pull you up when you are going in the wrong direction, and persuade, induce and inspire you to go in the direction that leads to your own highest good and welfare.

Sometimes, not realising this, we can develop a guilty conscience and find it difficult to go towards a temple and stand before the Deity. Somewhere else we may boldly utter some prayers before mankind, because we know that man does not know what is going on inside. But when we stand before a temple—unless our conscience is entirely blunted—we become aware of all our deficiencies, shortcomings, drawbacks and all that is within us that may not be very embellishing. And we know that the altar before which we stand holds a Being before whom nothing is hidden.

We are in a strange—extraordinary—position. We know what we are, and we know that He knows what we are, and, therefore, the situation becomes awkward. Sometimes we may gradually stop going to the church or synagogue or mosque or temple because whenever we go there we feel uncomfortable, just as a person who is breaking the law of the land feels uncomfortable near a police station.

So, gradually we can start drifting away from all religion because we find that in the light of our knowledge of our own interior and knowing that God knows everything, we feel a strange reluctance, an awkwardness in presenting ourselves before God. This is not a happy situation, for everything we have to obtain, we have to obtain from only one source and that is God.

And, therefore, here it is that the third dimension of God’s extraordinary relationship with and disposition towards us becomes important. For, as we said, God is not only our lifelong companion and indwelling, all-knowing witness, He is also our guide, friend and philosopher. More than that, personal religion goes much further and says that He is our father, mother, friend, relative and our greatest well-wisher. He is the helper of the helpless, the rescuer of those who are in danger, the uplifter of the fallen and a friend in need. When one has no one to help, He is the one there.

So, He is everything that an individual in this mortal world may need at any time, in any circumstance, in any situation. You only have to call; immediately He responds. For He is immediate and proximate. He can respond instantaneously. All other things may delay a little, but

God does not delay. It is this third dimension which is so overwhelming that it overshadows all and can induce us to present ourselves before Him in spite of all our drawbacks.

Jagat Guru Adi Sankaracharya put this truth in a very touching way in one of his compositions when he appeals to the Divine Mother for Her grace by concluding the ending line of each verse saying: "In this world, unworthy and bad sons there may be, but never a bad mother." That is the hope aspect of man's relationship with God. That is the positive, assuring and uplifting aspect of man's relationship to God. He is your constant companion. He is also your all-knowing, inner, indwelling witness. But, nevertheless, He is also your guide, friend and philosopher.

Therefore, no matter what you may be, with sincerity and earnestness, with a childlike simplicity of heart, turn towards Him and lay all your inner situation before Him, without withholding anything, concealing anything. Be frank as a child. And by His grace and the benedictions of the holy ones He keeps sending, you will overcome all things, attain supreme blessedness, make this life fruitful, and fulfil the mission for which you have been sent here on earth.

We have to raise our spirits to a height where we are bathed in light. There should be no room for dejection or depression, much less despair. There is no misfortune. All things that occur to us are opportunities brought upon the path by God, the source of all auspiciousness and blessedness.

Thus let us have the right perspective and see the hand of God in all things that come to us in life and regard them not as misfortune but opportunities. This is the choice and this is the truth, and if we choose the truth we shall ever be beyond all dejection and depression. We shall know that the face of God shines upon us.

40. SEE THE GREAT REALITY EVEN IN OBSTACLES

Worshipful homage unto Thee, Thou eternal, all-pervading and indwelling cosmic Spirit Divine! May Your grace be upon all those sincere seeking souls who are assembled here in Your divine presence! Grant them the blessedness of an unceasing aspiration, and a determined resolution to fulfil this aspiration, no matter what the obstacles, what the difficulties, what the adverse circumstances.

Grant them the insight, the vision and the wisdom to see in these obstacles necessary disciplines that are meant to strengthen their inner sinews, necessary disciplines that are meant to awaken in them their hidden powers which may then be manifested and exercised for this great attainment.

May they not see adverse circumstances as adverse circumstances or obstacles as obstacles. Grant them the vision and the wisdom to see them as opportunities, to see You present as obstacles, not thinking them to be the manifestation of something opposed to You, contrary to You, a second factor, a cosmic dichotomy. For we are within the tradition of the great sages and seers of the Vedas

and the Upanishads. We believe in a supreme, transcendental, absolute, non-dual Reality, which does not admit of any eternal cosmic dichotomy between the Divine and the undivine, the plus and the minus.

For us *sarvam khalvidam brahma; ekameva'dvitiyam brahma; brahmaiva satyam; ekam sat*—All this is Brahman; Brahman is one alone, without a second; Brahman alone is Truth; Truth is one. Therefore, grant them, by Your grace the wisdom to perceive the one great Reality even in the form of seeming obstacles.

Difficulties are not difficulties to those who are resolute and determined. The boatman who has to row across the flowing river only knows that hard rowing is necessary. He does not deem the rapid flowing of the river to be an obstacle. He just knows that he has to make it to the other shore. The only awareness in his mind is the need to persist in putting forth ever greater power until the other shore has been reached.

In this way, may Your grace manifest in them as resolute determination, as a vision and wisdom with which they face, accept and welcome everything that life is, and see in everything Your own manifestation, manifesting as an opportunity and an occasion for putting forth greater effort and as a situation brought in order to serve as a discipline through which to generate greater strength, to come out stronger.

Thus may Your grace manifest in them in these positive ways as spiritual qualities that will train them for the total perfection which is their great destiny!

Loving adorations to revered and beloved Holy Master who thus faced in his own spiritual life all that confronts a *yogi* or a monastic or a *sadhaka* upon this rugged path, and who emerged as a highly disciplined and determined Yogi and Vedantin. He not only emerged stronger, wiser and even more determined than ever, but greatly ripened and mellowed, with sympathy for seekers for all times, knowing through his own personal experience what they may have to face, may have to overcome, and may have to go through.

He used to say that suffering instills mercy and compassion in the human heart. Having undergone the same experience one is able to know and sympathise with the sufferings of others.

May his benedictions and glance of grace instil in us a sympathy and an understanding of the problems of *sadhakas*; and, above all, may it bring before us the necessity to generate from within ourselves a great perseverance, a powerful determination and a firm resolution. For these are our friends and assets on this rugged path. It is not only rugged, it is arduous. It is not a short cut, but a lengthy, continuous journey unto the last.

It therefore requires great patience, great fortitude. One should not think of its length, but as the wise Chinese philosopher said: “The longest journey is but one step.” Keep on taking this one step without stopping, without lagging behind, without sitting by the wayside, without wandering into the bypass of the pursuit of pleasure or satisfaction.

If we keep on taking that one step, no matter how rugged or arduous the path, then one day we are destined to reach that Goal Supreme. We are made to claim and obtain our birthright, our divine destiny. This is the truth.

Life is not what it seems. Obstacles may not be obstacles. Pains may not be undesirable. Seeming difficulties may be your friends. For, if the overall objective of human life, according to the Divine will, is evolution, progress towards perfection, then everything that comes your way should have in it the potential for helping you in this process.

People who are nasty, irritating or annoying, people who seemingly work against you, may be your friends. God might have sent them in order to show you that you are intolerant, impatient, capable of ill will, spite, retaliation or a spirit of vengefulness.

These are all a host of unspiritual reactions within you which stand in your way. Unless they are provoked, how can you know that they exist within you? Similarly, certain temptations may show you that you are capable of breaking your vow of *satyam* or *brahmacharya*.

So we must constantly try to see how God is trying to awaken us, in what way He is trying to help us unfold our higher nature. Then life will be very interesting. It will have something to tell us every moment. Suddenly, difficulties may assume a new light. Rather than being something to be annoyed at, or avoided, they may be a challenge, a warning or a helping hand. They may be something to invoke in us a higher virtue.

41. DAILY LIFE: A TEST OF INNER SADHANA

Gurudev has blessed us with a facility which provides the scope and possibility for all the four *yogas*. He has given us a field for the exercise of body, mind, intellect, and the spirit. This is a place of total unfoldment for your entire being from the least to the supreme. It is a centre of evolution from the human state to the state of transcendental illumination and blessedness. It is a bridge from humanity to Divinity.

For those who can perceive and utilise it as such, this valuable gift of Holy Master—this ashram—can be to them a ladder to enlightenment, total divine perfection, liberation and eternal blessedness. For this is what it is if it is always approached, not from an imperfect human angle, but from an awakened spiritual angle and an enlightened divine angle.

It is this way for the simple reason that Gurudev worked to create this ashram for this specific purpose. He gave utterance to the fact that he had provided here a total field and scope for our evolution. If we will approach it as such, shedding all inhibitions, clearing ourselves of preconceived notions and overcoming our intense preoccupation with our own human centre—which is a centre of opinions, conceptions, built-in reactions, prejudices and bias—then everywhere we turn we will see that this entire ashram is a rare gem, a rare gift for total evolution and perfection.

Even the seeming negative factors—which in our lesser human-nature-based and biased perception appear to be so many obstacles, problems and impeding factors hampering our progress—will suddenly be seen as valuable occasions and opportunities for us. They are to be made use of. They are chances given to test ourselves. They are neither to be suffered, nor borne, nor endured, but they are to be understood and made use of for our benefit, our highest good.

This ashram duplicates life as a whole. In whichever environment and situation we have been placed by the will of the Divine, the factors present in it are necessary for us as we are at this given time and place to enable us to work towards our perfection. For, each one of us has many things to be overcome, renounced and discarded; and a particular situation and circumstance is given to us as an opportunity for liberating ourselves from that which is holding us back from progressing towards our divine destiny.

If we thus perceive and understand life with a true spiritual vision, then our entire reaction to things that come to us day by day will be a creative reaction, a keen, analytical reaction: “What has this in it for me? God has given it with a definite plan and purpose. In what way can I gain from this situation, benefit myself and surge ahead? It does not come without meaning.” Thus, each situation, each set of circumstances each day, comes because that is the need for that day.

Our outer life and our inner spiritual life of *japa*, meditation, introspection, contemplation, reflection and concentration have a close, indispensable connection. They are necessary for each other. Our inner spiritual disciplines require to be tested for their authenticity, their genuineness, their effectiveness; and the scope and possibility for this is provided each waking day from dawn till dusk.

Daily life is an opportunity provided for us to exercise the spirituality gained during our inner studies, reflection, *japa* and meditation. It is the testing ground, so that each day our progress is really ours. We have made it our own by having tested it, proven it and possessed it. Until it has been tested and proven, it is not our own, it does not become part of us.

Every spiritual step forward becomes assimilated into your nature when it is thus exercised. That which is exercised actively becomes firmly grounded, permanently and truly your own. Thus there is an indispensable connection between your daily *sadhana* and your daily life.

It is in the context of daily life that you are able to actively exercise and test your spiritual progress. It is in the context of your daily *sadhana* that day by day the quality of your daily life is enhanced and enriched—it becomes further elevated to progressively ever higher dimensions of culture, refinement and a transformed spiritual nature. Ultimately, of course, this process—the daily enrichment of your outer life by the daily ascent of your spiritual inwardness—culminates in a total divinisation of your being and doing, your actions and reactions.

May we thus see this unified nature of our inner and outer life and not see them as two separated, mutually exclusive and opposed aspects. They are not two. They are one integrated and unified process of spiritual evolution.

One who perceives this becomes a totally balanced individual. He becomes truly possessed of the knowledge of the art and science of living life as one unified process of evolving day by day spiritually. And for us, the relevance of this spiritual fact is a necessary part of the understanding of this ashram life which we are leading, and all the factors that go to make up both the inner and outer life.

May the grace of the Divine and the blessings of Master enable us to see ourselves as what we are and to see our life and our environment for what it is. Thus, may this dual knowledge become a means of your steady spiritual progress and evolution into ultimate illumination and liberation!

The Reality is eternal and infinite. He is always and also everywhere always. Therefore, all places are sacred. Being one and non-dual, there cannot be anything besides Him. So things that we think are different from Him, and therefore take our minds away from Him, are only so because of the lack of discrimination and right vision with which we see them.

There is nothing wrong with the things that we see, but there is everything wrong with the way in which we see them. Things cannot be changed. They are here to stay. And luckily, things need not be changed because there is nothing wrong with them as they are.

We have to change. Our vision has to change to one infilled by a certain mental-emotional attitude of mind and heart where we look at all things with a spiritual vision, with an awakened divine awareness based upon the knowledge of realities.

All things exist. He is there in them as Existence. All things are conscious, and though manifestation of this consciousness may be in varying degrees, He exists in them as pure Consciousness. All things have within them the inherent ability to bestow bliss. He dwells within them as this bliss-bestowing factor.

Therefore, behind and beyond the grossly perceived names and forms there is *satchidananda*, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, pervading the entire universe. *Satchidananda* alone is eternal, unchanging, imperishable; therefore, *satchidananda* alone is the Reality. Names and forms cannot be the Reality because they are perishable and transitory.

So, how can unreality hide Reality? It is absurd. Ponder this. Then you will know in which way you should behold all things. There will be no obstacles, because we have changed. The world may be the same but we have changed. We will behold God here and now, the FACT and not the fiction. In the midst of the many we will see the One.

E. DISCRIMINATION

Thrice blessed are those who having chosen this glorious spiritual path are pursuing it with diligence, sincerity and deep earnestness, not allowing themselves to be beguiled by passing appearances. Through eternal vigilance, they are effectively preventing themselves from being

diverted to bypaths that lead away from the Goal. They are ever alert and wakeful to the inner enemies that dwell within themselves as part of their triune nature, and ever keep themselves armed and guarded against the subtle temptations of their own human nature, their human mind.

Thrice blessed are they whom having thus been made aware of their supreme divine mission in this earth life, live their life in the light of this awareness in a God-oriented way, bringing a divine quality to their thoughts, speech and actions, who are active in enquiry and discrimination, and who, with great earnestness and sincerity, keep themselves upon the straight and narrow path that leads to realisation, liberation and divine perfection.

42. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE LAW OF KARMA

Everyone today knows about the Law of Karma and *karma-phala-bhoga* (experiencing the fruit of action). It was once the possession of the East, but it is now a global insight. Everyone knows that this great spiritual law of cause and effect pervades human life.

It is also duplicated in the physical world of gross material sciences. You bring into being a certain cause; it brings into being a certain result. You sow a seed; it produces a plant of its own kind. Even so, in the psychological and psychical realm, if you manifest friendliness, the world becomes friendly to you. If you manifest hostility, the world responds in a like manner. The world is like a mirror. What you give comes back to you. And so it is said: “Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”

Therefore, every day this law of cause and effect is demonstrated before us, but we never pay attention. We do not understand the implications of what we see happening. We do not realise that we make our life by the way in which we keep on producing causes—mental, verbal and physical.

If we are wise, if we are really serious in our quest and in our spiritual life, we shall ever exercise discrimination, ever enquire: “My mind is harbouring this thought. Next moment it will propel me to engage in an action corresponding to this thought. What will be the effect of this action upon my spiritual life, upon my progress towards the Goal? What will be its result?” Thus a *sadhaka* thinks, a spiritual seeker thinks of the consequences of his action in relation to the reaction it is likely to bring into manifestation.

That is the hallmark of the wise seeker, *sadhaka*. For that is the one supreme task in his life. He is engaged in moving towards the sublime goal of God-realisation. Therefore, he engages in all such actions—mental, verbal, physical—that will enhance his progress towards the Goal, and he will abstain from all such acts—mental, verbal, physical—that are likely to detract or divert or take him away from the fulfilment of his quest.

This should always be borne in mind. One should live in the light of the awareness of this great law, which is our greatest friend, which is the sure guarantee of success in our spiritual life and *sadhana*. It can help us steer clear of many avoidable difficulties, problems and complications in

our spiritual life. If properly understood and properly applied in the living of our life, it is the one thing that can ensure us that we will attain the Goal without fail. It is a law that is the outcome of the great wisdom, love and justice of the Universal Soul—for the highest good and benefit of Its own *amsa* or part, the individual soul.

What we strive for we get. What we do not strive for, God may grant us or we may not get it. Therefore, we should pray to the Lord: “Grant us inner spiritual strength to resist temptations and to control the mind.” Simultaneously, we must work hard to develop inner spiritual strength which will help us to resist temptations and to control the mind.

Thus will our knowledge of *karma* and *karma-phala-bhoga* become fruitful and effective in success, in attainment, in achievement, in glorious fulfilment. God bless us all to become strong in the Spirit, to make the flesh also partake of this inner strength of the Spirit and to be obedient and subservient to the call of the Spirit and to the Law of Karma.

43. DISCRIMINATION

One of the basic ways to begin the study of Vedanta is with the *Vivekachudamani*, the Crest Jewel of Discrimination, by Sri Sankara, in which he sought to introduce the *sadhaka* to the Vedantic method of discrimination between the Reality and the appearance, the eternal and the non-eternal, the permanent and the fleeting, the Spirit and that which is non-Spirit.

In the field of spiritual *sadhana* we must also be *vivekis*. We must not only discriminate between the one undivided Brahman and the many—which is fleeting, temporary, subject to decay and dissolution in time, and limited in space—but we must constantly exercise, in an active manner, this supreme quality of *viveka* or discrimination in our daily lives.

We live for an ideal. We have adopted certain principles of life. We must, therefore, at every step, at every moment discriminate: “Will this thought, this sentiment or emotion, this word, this action, take me towards the ideal, or will it take me in a wrong direction? Is this helpful to me in making me centred in God, or is it something that will make me forget God? If it will make me forget God, I reject it. If it will help me to abide in God, I welcome it; I shall give a place to it in my life.”

The great lord of *dharma*, Yamadharmaraja, teaches this to the brilliant, young seeker, Nachiketas, in the Kathopanishad: “Two paths open up before each individual soul at every step, O Nachiketas, that which is merely pleasant, which attracts, beguiles and is likely to tempt and divert one away, and that which is good, which will uplift us, enhance our spirituality and lead us to glory.”

He speaks, therefore, of the *preyo marga* which is merely pleasant and the *sreyo marga* which may appear hard but wherein lies our highest good. And the wise *sadhaka*, endowed with *viveka*, always discriminates between the two. He rejects the merely pleasant which will lead nowhere or perhaps lead to grief; and, even though seemingly difficult, not so attractive, chooses

the direction that will take him upward, Godward, towards the fruition and successful attainment of the spiritual Goal.

Discrimination is not something that you just do in your meditation room or your study. In your room you may learn the art and science, the necessity, nature and method of right discrimination—reading works like the *Vivekachudamani*, the Bhagavad Gita and Gurudev's practical spiritual books—but discrimination itself is an internal state that has to be constantly ever active from the moment of waking up into this outer world until the moment of sleeping once again.

Discrimination is the first of the fourfold indispensable *sadhanas* (*sadhana chatushtaya*) our ancient spiritual masters have suggested and prescribed for us: *viveka*, *vairagya*, *shat sampat* and *mumukshutva*—discrimination, dispassion, the sixfold virtues and a burning desire for liberation. It is first because all other *sadhanas* depend upon a cultivated discipline of discrimination or *viveka*.

Without *viveka*, *vairagya* (dispassion) is not possible. It will only be sentiment, a passing, bubbling emotion or a mood. It is only through a constant exercise of *viveka* that *vairagya* gradually becomes a permanent state within your *antahkarana*. There have been cases where a sudden blow has become the turning point in one's life and launched one upon the spiritual quest. The person by that very experience becomes possessed by great *vairagya*. It becomes permanent, not a passing mood. But these are more the rare exceptions; they are not the rule.

On the contrary, in spite of repeated knocks and blows and bitter experiences, the human mind is so inveterately foolish, so inveterately bound up in delusion, that it soon returns to its previous ruts and grooves. Again and again it goes back to its age-old pattern of behaviour. It is only in rare cases that *vairagya* becomes like an ignition, and a blaze issues out of it. By and large the mind does not easily change its nature.

However, if by a constant, actively exercised *viveka*, we can change the very nature, the pattern, of the mind's thinking and relating itself to the outer world and its understanding of sense-objects, then gradually the mind can become an asset. Instead of becoming the net in which one is caught, our bondage, it becomes an asset.

And it is to this end that we have to try to understand the mind, train the mind, and keep the mind constantly guided by an awakened intellect, constantly giving it a correct direction, constantly guiding it in the direction of God. It is a never-ending process whether you are a *bhakta*, a *jnani*, a *yogi* or a *karmi*. It is an indispensable, hidden, inner *sadhana* that takes place no matter where you are and whether you are a Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Parsi or Jain.

Therefore, if upon this plane we discriminate and act wisely, and if we take all the help we can from *satsanga*, *svadhyaya* and *sad-vichara*, then gradually our consciousness can be made aware of the other plane, the higher plane of a spiritual awareness within our own being. And it is to the degree and the measure of your ability to lift up your interior onto that spiritual plane that the speed, the success and the fulfilment of your spiritual quest will depend.

That temptation is part of spiritual life was declared long ago by Yamadharmaraja to young Nachiketas in the Kathopanishad: Attractions always try to divert our attention, draw us away from the path and make us forget the Goal. Therefore, you must be vigilant and alert. You must steel yourself to resist the blandishments of this attractive world-appearance in which you have to live and through which you have to move towards the Goal Supreme.

You must exercise your discrimination. Be intelligent, be wise. Do not be puerile. In the ascent of the spirit towards total perfection and liberation, every step is assailed with attractions and temptations to take the easy path, the pleasant path that leads to darkness and bondage. You must show maturity and resolutely choose the path that leads to your highest good, your supreme welfare.

Therefore, the call is to wisdom. The call is to be wise, to be your own friend, your own well-wisher. Do not bring harm upon yourself. Do not court sorrow. Do not go after darkness and bondage when you are on the path that leads to light, to reality, to immortality and supreme liberation. Therefore, arise, awake, and until you reach the Supreme Goal, be aware and beware of these hurdles on the way.

44. FINE-TUNING YOUR DISCRIMINATION

A *sadhaka* is a person with a sense of keen perception, with a sense of discrimination and discernment, who keenly enquires and sifts the grain from the chaff, sifts the substance from the superfluous outer appearances, who goes to the *tattva* behind the *nama rupa*. He is always doing this.

And in this process of discrimination, the classical content of this *viveka* is usually stated as discrimination between the permanent and the passing, the eternal and the non-eternal, the Self and the non-Self, the Reality and the appearances. This is the traditional way, but in actual practical spiritual life upon the path of *yoga*, discrimination is seen to be more than that.

A *sadhaka* has to discriminate between what constitutes a factor favourable to his or her *sadhana* and what constitutes a thing not favourable. If a thing is favourable, it should be accepted and given a place in his *sadhana*. If it is unfavourable, it is to be rejected, to be given no place.

But this is not all. A thing may be amoral. It is not unfavourable but neither is it favourable. Can you then, in your daily life and *sadhana*, give a place to such a thing? Here is required another step in this process of discrimination. It is not unfavourable—it is amoral—but is it necessary? Should you clutter your life with unnecessary, avoidable things?

This is one step further, a fine-tuning of your discrimination. Supposing a thing is not positively and actually harmful or unfavourable, but it is unnecessary; it consumes your time. Then, in truth, it means that it deprives you of time which might have been utilised in *sadhana*. It may not be seemingly contrary to *sadhana*, but, in essence, it is contrary to *sadhana* because it has robbed you of a chance and a scope for furthering your spiritual life.

Therefore, the person who is earnest, who is a genuine seeker, will not allow something that is even indirectly adverse to his *sadhana*. He will always ask: "Is it necessary?" If it is not necessary, but it is unavoidable, all right, he suffers it. He suffers it, and at the same time tries to find ways and means of making this unavoidable occupation somehow spiritual in its content, by bringing a new *bhava* into it, doing it with a certain attitude, offering it at the feet of the Lord, remembering Him even in the midst of this tiresome, unavoidable process.

So, we should always be trying to find out how we can take maximum advantage of every drop of our life, every second of our time. Because that is the only thing we have. Diversions and byways may be very pleasant. But have we come here to pass our lives in pleasantries? Or have we come here to accumulate riches beyond compare?

Any diversion from the main way is a delay in reaching the Goal. It is so much energy wasted, so much time consumed. And if these diversions become our habitual vice, our habitual failing, our habitual folly, then we shall never reach the Goal. Because, delay beyond a certain limit may find us still far from the Goal, and suddenly life may come to an end. For life cannot be stretched; you cannot add to your allotted span of life.

So, if this really becomes a habitual failing of yours, ultimately you will have to pay the price of passing away still in a state of bondage, still in a state of imperfection, with your life's purpose unachieved. Do you wish this for yourself? Ask yourself this question, and let your deep reflection on it bring into your life a new alertness, a fresh vigilance and a determination not to allow this to happen; on the contrary, you will make use of every second for this great attainment.

We have to constantly keep sowing the seeds of noble spiritual ideas, feelings and intentions in our mind. Our destiny depends upon how we cultivate our interior. Guru Maharaj used to say: "Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character and you reap your destiny."

So, the cultivation of our interior, the sowing of seeds of right thoughts and right intentions is of the utmost importance to any serious *sadhaka*. "As you sow, so shall you reap." "As a man thinketh, so he becometh." If we allow our mind to be diverted and move away in ten directions into miscellaneous channels, in silly matters, where is the time to sow, with seriousness, the valuable seeds of right thinking and feeling?

Have we come here for little things by the wayside, when God has endowed us with intellect, made us in His image, has given us the great privilege of deep thinking, reasoning, discrimination, logic, enquiry, analysis? Is it to go to waste?

Therefore, radiant Divinities, who have come here to know and experience your own all-perfect, divine, essential nature, *nija svarupa*, be up and doing on the spiritual path. Be vigilant, be alert. Do not allow the mind to dupe you and beguile you away from the main task, and to divert you into these little byways.

Keep to the way. Byways are hundreds. The way is only one that goes straight to the Goal. Therefore, like a speeding arrow, take a straight course, without any diversion to this side or that

side, towards the Goal Supreme. That is wisdom. That is the hallmark of a true seeker, a true spiritual aspirant. Show yourself to be that. In this lies your highest gain, your supreme welfare, your greatest good.

45. PRACTICE AND DISPASSION

Lord Krishna's special prescription for attaining success in the spiritual life in and through the world was *abhyasa* and *vairagya* (practice and dispassion). *Abhyasa* and *vairagya* are twin corollaries. They cannot be separated. They are mutually supportive. The more you do *abhyasa*, the more you grow in *vairagya*. The more you practise *vairagya*, the more your *abhyasa* begins to progress and begins to be effective. They are like two wings of a bird.

This ancient divine teaching of Lord Krishna, His prescription for attaining supreme bliss and blessedness, was also expressed by Gurudev in his permanent message to mankind: Detach. Attach. Detach means *vairagya*. Attach means *abhyasa*. Doing and not doing both constitute practical religion. They are the obverse and reverse of the same coin.

Doing good to others is the positive aspect. Not harming, hurting or injuring others is the negative aspect of religion. To cultivate *satsanga*, the company of the wise, means to avoid the company of that which is *asat* or the company of that which is likely to take or turn you away from the *sat*.

This avoidance is as important an aspect of spiritual life, *sadhana* and Self-realisation as is the cultivating. Lord Krishna said: "*trividham narakasyedam dvaram nasanam atmanah kamah krodhas tatha lobhas tasmad etat trayam tyajet* (Triple is the gate of this hell, destructive of the self—lust, anger and greed; therefore one should abandon these three)." And Gurudev said: "Free us from egoism, lust, greed, hatred, anger and jealousy."

Thus, the whole of the scriptures contains nothing but cultivating and avoiding. The whole of religion is nothing but turning away from Mammon and moving towards God. We cannot worship God and Mammon at the same time. You cannot run with the hare and hunt with the hounds.

This avoidance is not an external practice. There is nothing outside to avoid because everything is God—all this is Brahman: *sarvam khalvidam brahma*. This *sadhana* of avoidance is something which is carried on within yourself, within your heart, your mind, your personality. Lust, anger and greed are not outside. There is no sin or evil outside. There is nothing to be avoided outside. If the inner avoidance has been done the outer avoidance is meaningless. For one established in *brahmacharya* all company is the same.

Within you there are also things which you must cultivate, you must cherish, you must practise. *Abhyasa* is also within you. *Abhyasa* is for the *svarupa* (divine essence) to constantly affirm Itself, assert Itself, manifest Itself in an active manner.

Vairagya and *abhyasa* are both to be done in the realm of the *kurukshetra* (battlefield) within you. A *sadhaka* is a being who is at war with himself inside. He fights the battle on two fronts: the practice of the active presence of the inner *svarupa* and, at the same time, dispassion for all those things that mitigate against this practice.

46. DUALITY IN NON-DUALITY

Worshipful homage unto the supreme Divine Reality, the transcendental, absolute, cosmic Spirit Divine that is minuter than the minutest, greater than the greatest, nearer than the nearest, farther than the farthest; that is non-dual and impersonal, yet is the most personal of all personal things. It is nearer and dearer to you than father, mother, relative and friend; It is the very life of your life.

It, therefore, stands, as it were, in a strange contradiction: personal and impersonal; remote, absolute, non-dual, transcending, but nevertheless, very immediate and our all in all. Non-duality and non non-duality both seem to inhere without any contradiction, any paradox, in that Being. For He is everything that exists.

Therefore, being infinite, omnipresent, that Being has to be everything that seems to us to be multifarious, many. They solved this paradox by saying that He is the One within the many, Unity in diversity: *eko devah sarvabhuteshu gudhah* (God, who is one only is hidden in all beings). Even so, in this life we meet two in one everywhere; there is duality in everything. You have to ponder how it is so, why it is so. And knowing it, how to make it a positive asset and not a negative liability. That each one has to work out for oneself.

The whole of nature, the whole of God's creation abounds in this duality. If a family comes here, we may suggest that they sanctify themselves with a Ganga bath. At the same time we tell them to beware of the Ganga, not to go out over their depth and to hold on to the chain. That means that the Ganga holds within itself the all-purifying divine power and grace and, at the same time, danger to life.

A match is indispensable in the household to light a candle or a fire, but if you are careless with it, it can cause a conflagration. All food will become insipid and tasteless if you lose the sense of taste. At the same time, the greatest problem of the spiritual *sadhaka* who wants to control his senses is the tongue. Without sight the entire visual world is lost to us, but at the same time, a real problem for *sadhakas* is the eye.

Inspiring and elevating truths can be imbibed by listening to discourses through the ear. You can listen to *bhajans*, *kirtan* or Vedic chanting. But, at the same time, if you listen to scandal, gossip and backbiting, it will be the source of irreparable harm to you. So, this one single organ of the ear can become to you a great elevator to God-consciousness, or, if misdirected, it can become a curse, a source of agitation and confusion in the mind.

The Bhagavad Gita says that the self itself is the greatest friend of the self, and the self itself is the greatest enemy of the self. The self with the senses controlled is your greatest friend, but your own self, personality, individuality, with your senses uncontrolled and turbulent, stands as your greatest obstacle, greatest problem. Thus the wise masters have admonished sincere seeking souls to relate themselves to all the senses in a relationship of control, of mastery. Having eyes be as though you are blind. Having ears be as though you are deaf.

Gurudev made us aware and warned us to beware of this strange, seemingly contradictory inherence of a duality in everything within and without. For example, he said that the body is the greatest gift of God, for through it you can do infinite good to God's creation and use it to attain your supreme good. On the other hand, he said that the body is the greatest bondage; it is the greatest curse. You should never again come back into it; therefore, strive for *moksha*, for liberation from the wheel of birth and death. So, the body has, at once, two seemingly opposite principles.

The Gita also brings home to us this contradiction at the psychological level. Lord Krishna asks Arjuna to free himself from a negative mood. He chastises him, scolds him, pulls him up. He appeals to Arjuna's intellect to assert its rationality to snap out of this abject, deplorable, unfortunate state of mind.

And the strange part of it is, it is this very psyche that was in turmoil and caused Arjuna's breakdown that—when it listened intently to Krishna's teaching, grasped it, absorbed it, understood and assimilated it—brought about a transformation, a clear psychological transformation. That very mind that had become Arjuna's stumbling block became clear, resolute, free of doubt and prepared to do the necessary. This means that the potential for such a change already inheres in the mind. Therefore, the resolution of the contradiction is in the hands of the *jivatman*, the individual.

It is said that the true Mahabharata is in the field of the human interior, the psyche. There you have to resolve the contradictions and become established in a single balanced state, an equanimous state.

In the spiritual path, all our experiences, negative and positive, that seemingly come to us from outside, actually spring from within us. For the essence of non-duality exists within us. It is how we relate ourselves, how we take things, respond to things, react to things, interpret things. Although our problems seemingly come from without, they spring from ourselves.

This is a truth to be deeply reflected upon and understood. It will give us the key to success. We should not seek solutions outside, because they are not outside. We have to seek solutions to our problems within, whether they be ethical, social, psychological or spiritual. Because, in truth, the problem is not without; the problem is within. We are the source of non-duality, and it is the mind that creates duality as well as non-duality. It is the source of contradiction and also resolution of the contradiction.

A newborn infant and an illumined sage behold the same world. Neither of them is affected. They are not bothered. But, when we have outgrown the natural innocence and simplicity of the infant and we have not reached the full maturity of illumination and enlightenment, we become the

prolific source of problems, complications, intricacies and complexities. It is because we have neither the simplicity of the infant, nor the enlightenment and illumination of the sage.

In between, therefore, there is a need for common sense, for caution, for alertness and vigilance. More than anything else, we need a proper understanding and a grasp of this fundamental truth that within us lies both the paradox of contradiction as well as its sure, unfailing solution. Therefore, wisdom, common sense and an alert awareness of the situation has to prevail always, because we move with this paradox and contradiction every moment of our wakeful life.

This is not only to be known as an intellectual or psychological fact, it has to be applied and exercised throughout our life as *sadhakas* and seekers until we reach illumination and liberation. It is for a practical purpose that the knowledge of this paradoxical contradiction is to be fully grasped and understood. It is not only for knowing, but it is for being applied, for doing something about it each day.

May the grace of God and the benedictions of the *guru* enable us to successfully apply this knowledge for unhampered progress in our spiritual life and *sadhana*, and for ultimately transcending all problems by and through this knowledge. May this truth enable us to make our spiritual life and *sadhana* progressive, successful and fruitful!

F. IT'S YOUR CHOICE

The fulfilment or otherwise of your life, the success or failure of your life, the attainment or non-attainment of your life—all of these depend upon the way you choose to think, choose to feel, choose to look at things, and the way in which you approach life and start to use it.

If you think failure and defeat, you invite failure and defeat, you deserve failure and defeat, because you have asked for it.

If you think success, attainment, fulfilment and achievement, you will succeed, your life will culminate in fulfilment, in glorious achievement, for you have invited it. That is what you deserve, and that is what you will receive.

47. YOU ARE WHAT YOU CHOOSE TO BECOME

The great Upanishadic seers of realisation have declared that life and the outcome of life for each and every individual is a matter of constant, continuous, moment by moment, choice. It is a matter of choice. What do you choose? What is your wish?

This, the great wisdom teachings of Vedanta very clearly and unambiguously state in the Kathopanishad. It is also very clearly brought home to us in the Srimad Bhagavad Gita which contains the quintessence of the Upanishadic teachings.

You are what you choose to become. Nothing is forced upon you. Nothing is imposed. You are not compelled. There is no external force in this universe that does it or can do it. All force, all power, is within you. You are the source of all force, all power. It is for you to choose how you will express it.

The Kathopanishad, through Lord Yama's teachings to Nachiketas says: "O Nachiketas, at every step, at each moment, before every human individual there are two paths, the path of wisdom and the path that is merely pleasant, the *sreyo marga* and the *preyo marga*."

In another context, the Upanishads say that constantly within the human psyche there is a flow of thoughts—constantly. They either take the channel of the auspicious or the channel of the inauspicious. It is for the wise, awake and alert individual to keep watch and to be immediately aware of which direction the thought flow is taking. If it is in the right direction, it should be encouraged. If it is in the wrong direction, it should be immediately checked, withdrawn, and the thoughts made to flow in the right direction, the direction that is conducive to one's highest welfare.

Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji reiterated this same truth, this same fact of human life in his own unique manner, summing it up briefly by saying: "Detach, attach." It is for you to say, "No," break the connection, and then attach to where you want the connection.

Disconnect yourself. It is for you to do so. Constantly you must make use of this power of choice and detach your mind from the petty pursuits and fleeting perishable objects of this world and attach it to the lotus feet of the Supreme. Detach and attach. He constantly said that this is what *sadhana* is. Herein lies the secret, the key to a progressive spiritual life and the surety of attaining the Goal. Detach and attach!

And, as though to clinch the issue—that you are a creature of choice, that what life ultimately means to you depends upon what you choose, that as you think so you become—at the conclusion of the Gita, Lord Krishna declares to Arjuna: "*yathecchasi tatha kuru* (Act as thou wishest). Now, it is up to you what you will choose, whether to follow, obey and do as I say or whether to follow your own mind, your own desire, and do as it propels you. It is up to you."

Therefore, the individual soul has freedom of choice. He can weigh pros and cons. Through his uniqueness and wisdom, he can anticipate consequences by reflection, by thought. Upon the basis of his own experience and what he sees happening in the world to others, through logic, rationality and intelligence he can anticipate what will happen if this or that course is taken, what will be favourable or unfavourable for him, what will be conducive to his highest welfare, what will be adverse to him. Then he can make a choice.

Thus we create for ourselves our experience, our future. Long ago in ancient *puranic* India they expressed the selfsame law "As a man thinketh, so he becometh" in an allegorical way. They said that upon both the right and left shoulder of each human individual two deities preside, and

they keep saying: “Be it so, be it so.” So, whatever arises within the hidden depth of your own inwardness, which you think is not known to anyone and sometimes may not even be known to oneself, these celestials say: “Be it so,” and so it comes to prevail.

For we live in the presence of God, and He is one who immediately grants to us whatever we wish. Therefore, we have the concept of the celestial wish-yielding tree or the celestial gem, holding which whatever you wish instantaneously manifests. Therefore, be careful what you ask for when you are in His presence.

He is a Being who can give us the highest, the sublimest, greater than which there is no other gift. So, when we are in the presence of a Being capable of such munificence, such abundance, why will we deprive ourselves of the highest and greatest of all gifts and attainments by asking for something very petty, small, puerile, or worse still, in our folly asking for something that is not good. For what you ask, that is given you.

Therefore, we have to guard ourselves not only from external inimical or adverse forces, but more than anything else, we have to guard ourselves against our own folly, our own ignorance. The *jivatman* suffers more through ignorance and folly than through any wickedness or evil. Wickedness and evil have a limited ability to injure you, make you suffer, but ignorance and folly can heap upon the individual soul endless suffering.

This reminds one of a subtly humorous statement, which nevertheless conceals great wisdom: “It is a great pity that ignorance is not painful.” If it were painful, people would try to get rid of it immediately. That all of you know; one does not want to allow any painful condition to prevail or continue. But unfortunately, ignorance not being painful, one allows it to be, and this leads to endless suffering later on.

The entire Vedanta *siddhanta* (doctrine) says that the great problem of man is *avidya*, *ajnana*. All suffering, all *tapa-traya*, all problems, all the complications that the human individual soul—which is part and parcel of the supreme, all-perfect Divinity—undergoes are due to ignorance. It is that which causes the individual to make the wrong choice and to later regret.

Through knowledge alone can ultimate liberation be attained. The Kathopanishad characterises the state of ignorance as little understanding like that of children. Due to this smallness of understanding, beings take the visible alone to be real and refuse to believe in and recognise the invisible which is the real. Therefore, they come to grief and are caught in the ever-recurring wheel of birth and death.

One, therefore, has to guard oneself against one’s own folly through awareness, through reflection, through always being in the company of wise people. That is why *satsanga* has been lauded so much as one of the gates to liberation. The company of elevating, inspiring books is also very helpful in the process of gradually progressing towards wisdom. One needs to be simple of heart, humble and prepared to learn.

Our situation is very much indeed a situation of choice. This choice is that which ultimately decides what you become, what your life ultimately culminates in. This indeed is to be pondered

deeply, known very clearly and constantly borne in mind. With this awareness live wisely, choose rightly, act spiritually and crown yourself with blessedness.

May the choicest blessings of Gurudev be with you at every step taking you in the right direction, making you choose the correct alternatives. Thus may you with wisdom, alert awareness and an active discrimination steadily move towards the Goal!

48. WHAT WILL BE YOUR CHOICE?

The humble prayer of this servant at this moment is that you may be enabled to grasp and absorb the practical spiritual teachings of Gurudev and apply them in your own day-to-day life, that you may adopt them as the very principle and pattern of your living, and thus, before you shed your physical body and go forth from here, you may be able to realise the Absolute, you may be able to enter into an experience of that great Reality and abide in that great Reality.

Whether this will be a fact or only a distant hope, whether this will be a dream or the reality, depends entirely upon you. It depends entirely upon each and every one of you. It depends upon your choice. It is a matter of choice. It depends upon your wisdom. It depends upon your right understanding and clear perception. How do you understand your presence here on planet Earth? How do you understand yourself as a part of human society?

Your presence here is primarily in human society, a society that is endowed with the power of perceiving, observing, understanding, enquiring, discriminating, reasoning, selecting and rejecting. All other forms of life are, by and large, body-bound in their consciousness and the living of their life. They are not endowed with this unique faculty of reasoning and coming to right conclusions or wrong conclusions depending upon whether their reasoning is right or wrong.

Reasoning can depend upon logic. Or, it can depend upon bias, prejudice or self-love. Then the reasoning will lead you astray. But the real point is that whether this chance and opportunity of being a human being will be rightly used or not depends not upon God, not upon faith, not upon others. It depends upon each one of us. It is a question of choice.

This is made very clear by Yamadharmaraja when He was confronted by Nachiketas. Yamadharmaraja, who had knowledge of this side as well as that side, who knew what becomes of the soul after physical death, who knew the nature of the Reality dwelling within this unreal, temporary body, tells Nachiketas: "It is a matter of the individual soul's choice. Before each one of them open up two paths.

"The first path is the one that is pleasant and satisfies the senses, a path fraught with the danger of losing one's freedom through attraction, through slavery. For the more one indulges the more intense becomes the desire. The second path is apparently difficult and does not seem to be pleasant but leads to one's highest good, one's supreme welfare. It is for the individual to choose whether one will go towards that which is merely pleasant and attractive or one will go in the direction of that which is difficult but glorious."

And Yamadharmaraja goes further to say that the vast majority of human society is short-sighted. They are shallow; they do not use their faculty of deep thinking and reasoning. So whatever they perceive through the senses, they decide is the only reality. Seeing is believing. Thus concluding, they run after temporary things believing that there is nothing beyond. Failing to perceive the greater Reality, taking this temporary appearance to be reality, these small-thinking people come again and again into the wide-spread net of death.

Nachiketas perceives immediately. He has right reasoning, clear perception, and he says: “Then I only want the highest, the supreme, that which is permanent, unchanging and imperishable.”

Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji wanted everyone to be like Nachiketas. He wanted us to be wise, perceiving, and with clear thinking and right reasoning to make the heroic choice. He always used to say: “You should have the Nachiketas spirit.”

Lord Krishna left to Arjuna the choice of the direction he will take. Even before the Mahabharata war He put two alternatives before Arjuna and said, “You choose.” He did not help Arjuna to choose. Arjuna chose Krishna instead of the Yadava army. Duryodhana thought Arjuna to be a fool and rejoiced that the army was left for him. But Arjuna had wisely chosen the Divine.

The source of all human actions is the human mind, the thought that you allow to occupy and dominate your mind. It requires vigilance, policing, alertness, wakefulness, *jagriti*. Thus knowing, the wise *yogi*, the spiritual aspirant, is ever alert. This choice we are speaking of is not the choice of some momentous point in your life. It is a choice which commences at every dawn and continues throughout your waking hours until you retire at night.

This wakefulness and choice must be constantly exercised each moment, at every step, all of your life. There is a *bhajan* which says: “O, keep your steps upon the highway of life, carefully discriminating, reflecting well before each step about the direction you are stepping.” Thus a constant awareness and a correct choice is what is indicated when the principle of self-choice is put before us as the great fact of a successful spiritual life.

Similarly, departing from here, the great Buddha, the enlightened one, admonishes his followers: “O Bhikshus, be a light unto yourselves and be a lamp unto the feet of others.” The light is within; shine with that light. Let that light radiate, let it manifest in and through your life—your thoughts, words and deeds. Shine with the light that you are, and so let your life be an ideal one that illumines the path of others.

Now, it is left to you. Will you shine with that light that you are? Will you be a lamp unto the feet of others? Will your very being be an awakening light, a constant process of illumining this human society, this *prapancha*, wherever you go? Or, will you forfeit this great privilege, this great blessing? Will you allow yourself to be entrapped in the grosser, lower self?

If you allow yourself to be enslaved by the lower self, then your life becomes a centre of discord, disharmony, falsehood, unspirituality. All that is the very contradiction of your supreme

divinity begins to occupy the field of your relationships with others, vitiating the atmosphere and creating *asanti* in yourself and others, spreading darkness instead of light.

Therefore, let us choose to shine as the light that we are. We make this choice now! We shall never allow the lower self and its negativity to eclipse the full radiance of our divinity. We shall never allow it! We shall be vigilant; we shall ward it off. No matter how many times we shall be assailed, we shall emerge victorious. We shall shine with the great radiance of the light that we are. This will be our life.

Thus we choose, and throughout the remaining days of our life, this choice will guide us. We will abide by this choice, and at each step we will choose to move in the right direction. We will choose to be what God has meant us to be, what we really are.

This is the great need. This is wisdom. In this lies your highest blessedness. Let this be your wise choice, and let this choice guide you each day of your life at every step. May the grace of the ever-present Divine Reality, the benedictions of the *guru* who dwells within you, enable you to succeed in this great choice!

At every step each day make your choice and move towards the Light. In this lies your assurance of transcending all pain and sorrow and entering a state of perennial bliss. Supreme bliss does not come. We have to move towards it. We have to ask for it. We have to opt for it. We have to work for it. Then it is ours. Thus, joy or sorrow, bondage or freedom, restlessness or peace is a matter of individual choice. The way is before us and it is up to us to choose the direction.

49. CHOOSE TO DWELL IN TRUTH

Yesterday, we briefly dwelt upon the central experience around which the whole edifice of the Vedic religion is built. The sages who had this exalted experience declared that everything here is indwelt by the presence of God. God is immanent in all existence. *Isavasyamidam sarvam yat kimcha jagatyam jagat* (All this whatsoever in this universe that moves or moves not is indwelt by the Lord). Thus they declared this central experience upon which the whole of Hinduism is based.

This central experience was once again granted to Arjuna in the astounding and amazing vision by which he was blessed, through the grace of Lord Krishna, in the eleventh chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, when Lord Krishna granted him the vision of His cosmic form. Arjuna saw God and God alone everywhere. Wherever he turned, wherever he gazed, he beheld nothing but God. He was thrilled, exalted, awestruck, overwhelmed by this great vision.

Sarvam khalvidam brahma. Neha nanasti kinchana (Verily, everything here is Brahman. There exists nothing other than This). In the light of this great vision, this great experience, this central fact of the Vedic vision and the Vedic way of life, how should one conduct oneself? These detailed instructions were given by the same Lord Krishna in the eleventh book of the great scripture the Srimad Bhagavata Mahapurana when He declared His last and final departing message to the great devotee, Uddhava.

Through him, He taught what it means to live in the light of this great vision, to remember it and to bring it into your feelings, your thoughts, your view of things and the way in which you relate yourself to life. And this vision and this teaching gives you the key to how to spiritualise all your life, your actions and your day-to-day dealings with this world in which you have to live, move and have your being, physically speaking.

Can this physical aspect of your life also be spiritualised, raised up to a spiritual height? Yes. Not only yes, but if you wish to enter into God-experience, it is indispensable. Otherwise, you will always be held prisoner to this gross level of consciousness. You will ever dwell in physical consciousness and relate yourself to this physical world outside on that level only. There will be no possibility of your rising beyond and going into a higher plane of spiritual consciousness unless and until you spiritualise the physical—transform it—and in and through it raise yourself to a higher level of spiritual consciousness. It is through your day-to-day life that you have to gradually proceed upon the ladder which ascends into the supreme realm of God-vision.

It is up to you to decide whether you will allow the changing appearances to completely fill you and dominate your life or whether you will allow the inner spiritual fact to infill you and transform your life. You have to choose.

What is your choice—to allow the ever-changing, physical appearances to be the basis of your life and actions, or to choose to make the great spiritual experience and fact of your ancestors to be the basis and means of relating yourself to this world outside? If you clearly recognise that it is upon this choice that the vision and quality of your life depends, you will reach the ultimate experience.

If you choose to set aside this great truth, shove it to the sidelines, your life will be an everlasting groping, stumbling, falling and moving around in circles. If you choose to live in the light of this truth, then your entire life becomes illumined. You no longer live in the dark; you walk in the Light. You are able to declare: “I am in the Light; the Light is in me; I am the Light.”

Then your whole life becomes spiritualised. This is a matter of your choice—whether in the presence of Light you choose to dwell in darkness, or whether you choose to come out of the darkness once and for all, refusing, rejecting, all possibility of return to that darkness. You say: “*tamaso ma jyotir gamaya*. Never more, after having come into contact with the Isa Upanishad, the Bhagavad Gita, the Bhagavatam and with Gurudev who lived all three, never more shall I live in darkness in the midst of Light. I shall ever dwell in the Light, move in the Light and ultimately attain illumination.”

If that is the determination, then nothing in this world can prevent you from becoming a *jivan-mukta*, from living a radiant life of divine vision and quality. For in this awareness anything that is petty, ignoble or unspiritual cannot prevail—impossible! Anything that is petty, that is unspiritual dare not enter into such a life. Even if it enters, it will be discovered immediately, put to shame and hastily got rid of, not allowed to proceed further. Such is the power of the radiance, the power of the light of God, that you invoke if you choose to live in this vision.

The choice is before us each day, each dawn. As a matter of fact, the Kathopanishad goes one step further and says that the choice is before you each moment, at every step. The choice is always before you within and without, in the realm of your thoughts, your sentiments and feelings as well as your actions which are only a pale reflection of that which you are, that which, in fact, is your true field of action.

The Kathopanishad also says that it is not realised, it is not attained, by one who has not turned away from the wrong ways of living. It cannot be attained by one in whom serenity has not been established through renunciation, right perception, detachment and the giving up of delusion. It cannot be attained by one who has not ingathered his mind, overcoming its restlessness and ceaseless tendency to move outwards and lose itself among the objects of the senses. Unless the mind is resolutely brought inside and made to stay upon the Atman, one cannot attain illumination.

It can be attained only through the wisdom that dawns when these conditions have been met. Therefore, verily, every moment of your life you have the choice of adopting a spiritual vision, of invoking a spiritual *bhava* and attitude, and seeing in every act that you do an association with that great Reality that is immanent in all creation.

“I am not far away from God. God is never far away from me. He is everywhere, all around, within and without. This is the truth. In this truth I shall strive to live.” If you choose thus, you are on the way to immortality, to liberation, to divine perfection.

All the scriptures are a call to this choice, the right choice: Arise, awake and seek enlightenment. All the scriptures are a great clarion call to adopt this vision, to live and act in the light of this vision, and to attain illumination. That is the great, eternal call of the Upanishads to each and every one of you.

Outer circumstances do not matter. Because it is the inner view and vision that has the power to transform, to overcome all outer circumstances and to make you see the Divine indwelling the so-called gross physical universe.

There is no gross physical universe at all. Everywhere only God prevails. Everywhere only the Divine pervades. You live in that Divinity. The so-called gross world and earthly circumstances are our creation, our imagination. Brahman alone exists.

Let us live in truth. Let us affirm and assert the truth and not commit the great error of choosing to live in falsehood. Reject falsehood. Affirm truth. That is the whole of *viveka* and *vichara*, of discrimination and enquiry. May God and *guru* enable you to lead this lofty life of the truth-vision and crown yourself with supreme blessedness in this very incarnation, in this very body!

Ponder this deeply and well. If you make up your mind, there is no such thing that is impossible to the human soul, the *jivatma*, richly endowed with a human birth and status. This truth is to be firmly grasped.

If you consider yourself to be a weak human being, then everything is impossible, everything is difficult, everything is uncertain. If you consider yourself to be a divine being, everything becomes possible, everything becomes easy, everything becomes sure and certain.

So, whether you think of yourself in error or whether you think of yourself in knowledge is the decisive factor. What do you choose? Darkness or light? Error or knowledge? *Ajnana* or *jnana*? It is for you to decide.

Gurudev wants you to live in the light of knowledge, to arise, awake, and attain wisdom. The Upanishads want you to live in the light of knowledge. The prayer *tamaso ma jyotir gamaya* induces you, reminds you, goads you, to live in the light of knowledge. Ignorance has never been encouraged in the context of the Vedic way of life, in the context of the spiritual culture of India. It has never been favoured.

This indeed is a crucial, decisive factor upon which you must take a definite stand—without vacillation, without faltering, without uncertainty.

50. YOU CHOOSE WHAT YOU BEHOLD: GOD OR MAYA

This world in which you live, the things you are surrounded by, at once constitutes the illusory creation of *maya*—deluding, attracting, tempting, pulling you out, an enchanting bazaar of false appearances drawing you away from your right direction, away from your goal—and at the same time it also constitutes nothing but God, God appearing in ever so many forms, a great grand revelation, a manifestation, a cosmic expression.

And the paradox is that our scriptures declare and affirm both these things. At one point Lord Krishna says: “Very hard and difficult indeed is My *maya*, made of the three *gunas*, to cross, to go beyond. Most succumb to its attraction, lose the way and get caught in the net of death and rebirth.” In the same Gita teachings, He says to Arjuna in the eleventh chapter: “Behold the reality of this universe.” Arjuna looks and sees only God, God alone everywhere.

So you live in this paradox. What does it mean to you? What do you make of it? Are you living in God, or are you surrounded on all sides and overwhelmed by *maya*? What is the truth? It is for you to decide. He that hath eyes, let him see. He that hath ears, let him hear.

The paradox will be there. But the paradox may not be a paradox. It is simply to say that Brahman and *maya* coexist. God and His deluding power coexist. It is for you to choose what you will see. The Upanishads give the analogy of the munja grass which has an inner core that can be drawn out of the outer covering. If you are not aware of this you will only see the outer appearance.

Similarly, the outer side of all things is the deluding, tantalising, tempting *maya*. But the inner side is the one, all-pervading, ever-present, divine Cosmic Reality. It is, therefore, for you to decide towards which you will direct your vision. As you look, so you will behold. If you look at it

with the eyes of non-discrimination, you will behold only the outer appearance. If you look at it with the eyes of discrimination, then you will behold the hidden God.

You must look with a special eye. Just as in the eleventh chapter of the Gita the Lord clearly declared to Arjuna that he would not be able to see with his ordinary eye, and so He bestowed upon him an extraordinary eye; so, in this century, Gurudev came amidst us to try to give us the right vision, to bestow upon us a divine way of looking at things, of beholding the Divine Reality hiding within the outer appearances. He tried to bestow upon us the right vision through his writings, through his teachings and through the wisdom he imparted to us by the way he lived his life.

Whether you behold God or *maya* depends upon you. They coexist. You cannot separate them. It is for you to be wise, for you to be awakened within, for you to use discrimination and behold the essence and not be deluded and overcome by the appearance. If you thus live, the world will elevate you to sublime heights each moment. It has the potential to inspire you, elevate you, fill you with Divinity.

Therefore, look and behold the Reality. Do not allow your mind to be drawn away by the appearance. Let your life be lived in wisdom and discrimination. Let your life be lived with an awakened vision, never missing the essence, at all times beholding only the Reality: *samam sarveshu bhuteshu tishthantam paramesvaram vinasyatsv avinas- yantam yah pasyati sa pasyati* (He sees, who sees the supreme Lord existing equally in all beings, the unperishing within the perishing). Thus the Lord has declared.

Therefore, if you live with this eye of discrimination, you can also say: “I live, move and have my being in God.” God will become the greater reality to you. *Maya* will fade away and take a back seat, and you will practise the presence of God. You will benefit by the divine proximity. Life will become to you an Upanishad. Thus may you live and become blessed forever!

You have this great blessedness of having a dual awareness—a lesser awareness which is an error, and a greater awareness which is the truth, the correct awareness. And this wonderful fact grants you the privilege of being in a position to make yourself an instrument, not merely of the limitations, finitude and imperfections of your temporary, fleeting human personality, but choosing, on the other hand, to make yourself an instrument for the expression and manifestation of all the perfections that comprise your true, essential divine nature.

You have the privilege of making this choice: I shall make myself an instrument of my divine perfection, not my human imperfections. I shall make myself a centre of God. I shall make myself a centre of God's perfection, beauty, truth, purity, compassion, forgiveness, wisdom, harmony, love, tolerance, peace, friendship, helpfulness and divinity.

In short, I shall choose; and I will apply and utilise this great privilege that I have of making myself an instrument of all that is lofty, noble and sublime. I shall supply to the world that which it lacks. I shall not add more clouds to the firmament. I shall bring a ray of sunshine!

51. CHOOSE TO MANIFEST WHAT YOU ARE

What will you yield, in the form of the living of your life, in the world into which God has sent you? The oyster yields a pearl because that is what it holds within its bosom. The gold mine yields gold because that is what it holds within its bosom. What will you yield from within the depths of your own personality, your nature, your individual identity? What will be your gift to the world? It is for you to choose. It is for you to make this choice and to live your life in this grand arena, which gives you the occasion, the opportunity, and the unlimited scope and freedom to be what you are.

God did not send His own radiant ray, His own *amsa* (part), His own individualised expression, to spread darkness where one has the full potential to manifest light. God did not send His own chosen ones, His children, to do anything except to manifest His love, His purity and peace, His kindness and compassion, the fragrance and beauty of His all-virtuous divinity. All that is positive, auspicious, blessed and beautiful inheres in God as His transcendental, perfect, pristine nature. And He dwells within you. He is manifest here as you. You choose whether you will withhold it or gloriously manifest it.

To make the right choice—purposefully, intelligently, wisely, with discrimination—is the great privilege of only one species of creatures on this planet Earth, and that is the human being. Reflect well on this, and act in harmony with this inner fact.

When you can make your life beautiful, why should you allow it to give place to ugliness? When you can make your life wonderfully fragrant, why should you allow any contrary factor to mar its fragrance? When you can make your life luminous, effulgent and radiant, why should you deny yourself this privilege? When you can make your life all that is good, auspicious and beautiful, why should you not do so and be a blessing to all?

For, this is your birthright which you can claim. Therefore, throughout the day always let your choice be for Divinity and the expression of what you really are. Let each word that you speak, each thought that you harbour in your mind, each sentiment or emotion that you cherish in your heart, each action that you engage in, bring forth, express and actively manifest the purity, the sublimity, the blessedness, the auspiciousness and the radiance that you are.

What a great blessing, what a great privilege this life is! It would be a pity not to see it as such. Make up your mind, therefore, that each day, every moment, at every step, your choice will be to manifest the Truth within you, and never anything else but this. Choose always to be the best, the highest. Choose to be what you really are. Choose to be the source of blessedness.

In this choice lies not only your own highest good, but in it lies the good of all creatures. In this lies the highest well-being of the contemporary world in which you live. This is the truth, and this is the occasion and the opportunity. This is for you the moment to prove your wisdom in all your life each day.

Choose to manifest the glory that you are, the grandeur that your true identity constitutes, the sublime loftiness and nobility which is your true dimension. Choose to manifest the divinity that

you have been made aware of by the awakening teachings of Gurudev and that you have been awakened to by the Being who sent you here and brought you here, and who indwells you as the great Light of lights beyond all darkness shining in the innermost chambers of your heart.

When God and Gurudev have offered you this priceless gift and this unique privilege, will you turn away from it, reject it and refuse to receive it, or will you eagerly grasp it and make your life sublime? This choice is not a single act at some time in your life. This choice is an ongoing, continuing process forming the very living of your life—day by day, moment by moment, in each and every act—mental, verbal and physical.

This choice has to be made constantly, and the right choice at each moment and each step constitutes the steps of the shining stairway that leads to the highest state of blessedness, divine perfection and liberation. May every moment of each day be an upward ascent upon this shining stairway that leads to the Goal Supreme. Thus determine within yourself and crown yourself with glory!

G. SELF-CONTROL

Knowledge cannot save a person from entering into darkness, bondage and grief, unless it is infilled with wisdom and discrimination at every step, and unless the power of choice is wisely and effectively exercised. Even knowledge combined with wisdom and discrimination will prove futile, vain and ineffective unless it is backed up by strong will-power to apply the knowledge in a determined, resolute way.

Therefore, knowledge is good, but it is useless unless it is infilled and supported by wisdom. Wisdom is good, but it is ineffective unless it is supported by discrimination and right enquiry. Discrimination and right enquiry are good, but they cannot help you if they are not supported by inner spiritual strength, determination, sincerity, earnestness and a resolute will.

52. LIBERATION HAS AN IMMEDIATE RELEVANCE

The supreme, ultimate goal of the Vedic way of life is *moksha* or liberation. And while the immediacy of this goal has been posited and affirmed in the here and now sense of *jivan-mukti* (liberated in this life while still living), still a feeling has been created that it is something remote to be striven after, to be attained, to be reached far away, a distant goal: “*yad gatva na nivartante tad dhama paramam mama* (Having gone thither, they return not: that is My supreme abode).”

But liberation has a relevance, an immediate relevance and implication as well. And perhaps if this immediate implication is not recognised, understood and grasped, then the traditional concept of liberation will always continue to be a far-off, distant and remote attainment. Perhaps we will never reach towards it.

For, there are many things—it is not only *ajnana* or ignorance—that bind the *jivatman* in this body. There are many other petty things—petty but powerful—that hold us to this earth-life consciousness, to *jivahood*. They have been binding us since birth. And, it is to liberate ourselves from this immediate bondage that a certain way of life has been prescribed for us within the context of the Vedic way of life.

The first thing we have to liberate ourselves from is selfishness. Identification with the body creates a false sense of a separate personality, an entity. And it is not only a false sense. It is a false sense of a false personality, where the falseness of the false personality is carefully veiled away from our perception. It is endowed with a sense of being a solid reality, and we are bound to it. This is the veil of *maya*.

Due to this sense of a separate identity and the idea that this personality is very, very important, there arises selfishness. A selfish person always expects something from others. And where there is expectation there is misery—there is always misery. There is also *raga-dvesha*, like and dislike, attraction and repulsion. There is anger also. All these are defects of selfishness.

But the foremost defect of selfishness is expectation. A selfish psyche or individual expects something from others, from this world, from everything, all of God's creation. And expectation means misery. So, if you want to liberate yourself from misery, you have to liberate yourself from selfishness through a new approach to life.

If your attitude becomes one of unselfishness, of selflessness, of living for others, not demanding or taking from others, you will expect nothing, but you will give everything. Then you are freed from the frustration and disappointment of non-fulfilment of expectation, because there is no expectation to be fulfilled. So the misery of non-fulfilment is out of the question for you. You eliminate it from your life. You become contented. You are a happy, cheerful, satisfied person.

We also have to gradually learn to liberate ourselves from the stern tyrannical demands of the *annamaya kosa* or the gross body. To do this, Patanjali prescribed *tapasya*. Train yourself to hardship, simplicity of life. Do not pamper your body. Do not be luxurious. Don't be a softy all your life. Do not give in to the body's demands for comfort and luxury. In its extreme form it can mean walking with bare feet and keeping your head uncovered in the hot summer sun. Thus, liberate yourself from the tyrannical stranglehold that the body has on you.

Now, this is indicative of what liberation means. Apply it to the demands that each one of the *kosas* (sheaths) makes upon your consciousness: the *pranic* sheath with its hunger and thirst, the mental sheath with its sentiments, desires, scheming, imaginations and projecting into the future. In a hundred ways they tyrannise you. But unless you liberate yourself from their tyrannical stranglehold, how can you expect supreme liberation? Unless you liberate yourself from these little attachments, these little earthly affections—sense pleasures, sense of importance—how can you expect *aparoksha-anubhuti*?

We must further liberate ourselves from earthly affections and attachments. As long as you have earthly affections and attachments, they divert your mind and they focus your attention and

energy towards themselves. And, as long as your mind and heart are scattered and focussed upon various things, giving yourself with all your heart to the Supreme Reality is out of the question.

Liberating yourself from earthly attachments and affections is a preparation, an indispensable prerequisite to fulfilling the greatest of all commandments of the Lord Jesus to love the Lord thy God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul—with your entire being. We must refuse to be beguiled, attracted and entangled in created things. Say: “Not anything you have created, O Lord, but You and You alone is whom I desire, whom I long for, whom I yearn after, whom I love and cherish with all my heart’s love and devotion.” That is necessary if you want to have *atma-nishtha* (steady abidance in the Self).

Therefore, you must liberate yourself from the powerful pull of the senses towards their sense-objects. You must learn to recognise the hollowness of all things. What we think is pleasure is actually pain. What we think is happiness is actually misery. *Ye hi samsparsaja bhoga duhkha-yonaya eva te* (The enjoyments that are born of contacts are only wombs of pain). Thus, very, very categorically, clearly, unambiguously and unmistakably this truth has been put before us, not merely for our knowledge or information, but for making it the basis of our relationship with all the pleasurable sensations and attractions of sense-objects.

Therefore, when this is known, curbing the senses becomes natural. You don’t want to rush towards your own unhappiness. You don’t want to rush towards misery and pain. The *viveki* (discriminating one) doesn’t do it. The *budhah*, one who is awakened in intellect, does not go after them. Be a wise person. Be a *viveki*. Liberate yourself from the pains that arise by expecting pleasurable sensations from things that are the source of misery and pain.

Therefore, liberate yourself from the senses that drag you towards the sense-objects. Liberate yourself from the tendency of the mind to move towards the senses. Discipline and control of the senses and conquest of the mind is also an immediate liberation. This is liberation for you. It has an immediate relevance, and unless this liberation in its immediacy is first of all recognised, pursued and attained, you cannot move forward to that ultimate liberation.

Liberation commences here and now. Liberation must be attained right here. And it is only when you know that the whole visible universe is a myth, a dream, a long drawn dream—it has no substance, it is meaningless, it is like a bubble, its value is zero—that you become liberated from the immediate oppressive sense of the so-called solid reality of this world. Vedanta alone can liberate you here and now from this oppressive sense.

You cannot go after two realities. If you want to dedicate yourself totally to the attainment of the Reality, it cannot have a competitor. It is either the world or God. It is either the *anatman* or the Atman. Everything created is a great jugglery of *maya*. Not only this universe, but millions and billions of universes constitute a big cipher to the true Vedantin or the true lover of God.

We should liberate ourselves right now! Liberation from this sense of reality of the outer universe brings immediate, total serenity. There is no inclination for the inner being to move either this way or that way. For one knows that one moves only towards ciphers, empty nothings. So, why burden yourself by moving towards something which has no meaning, no value, no substance?

Thus one becomes settled in the inner sanctum. Serenity prevails. Peace descends. One is always steadfastly established in a peace that is unknown to one who takes this world to be a reality.

Thus, the immediate liberation of oneself from selfishness, love of created things, the attractions of pleasurable sense-objects and the sense of reality of appearances, becomes a great blessedness, a great state of blessedness. It yields immediate dividends here and now. You don't have to wait for some far-off state. Instantaneous is the gain of this progressive process of liberating yourself from all that holds you bound to anything else other than the Supreme Reality.

Liberate yourself every moment. Keep on liberating yourself with every breath, every step that you take. Let your entire day-to-day living be a process of ever liberating yourself from every factor that binds you. This is the process. This is the *sadhana*—the unseen *sadhana*—known to you, seen by God and none else. Launch yourself upon this process of immediate liberation right now and get immediate gains step by step, progressively! There is no end to this immediate gain and blessedness, ever-increasing blessedness!

53. SELF-MANAGEMENT IS ESSENTIAL FOR LIBERATION

The teachings that the great teachers of mankind have given to us on the spiritual life are very clear about one thing, and that is that there can be no question of spiritual life, spiritual experience, unless one readily, willingly and purposefully attempts to control and conquer one's lesser human nature and tries to be the master of one's inclinations, passions and sensual appetites.

Unless the inclinations of the senses towards sense-indulgence and the urge of the mind towards innumerable desires and satisfactions are kept in check, unless they are countered and controlled, spiritual life is only a fantasy, an imagination. Even if it is not a fantasy or imagination, it is but a losing struggle. It is but a see-saw, up and down, earning and spending, never having anything, never acquiring anything, never gaining anything.

Self-control is the key. An earnest attempt to control one's lesser human nature is the condition prerequisite for the successful awakening and active manifestation of one's higher divine nature. All *yogas*, *yogis* and *yoga* texts have this to declare. The greatest overcoming is the overcoming of oneself. This must be recognised. One must accept this fact willingly for the sake of the success of one's spiritual *sadhana* and life. Otherwise, one is ever working against oneself.

It is in this context that great ones have said: "If without self-restraint, without control over one's lesser human nature—one's appetites, sensual urges, desires, passions—spiritual illumination and liberation is possible, then it is equally possible for a mountain range to float on the surface of the ocean."

They have said this just to show how impossible it is for any individual soul who wants the highest to gain it if he is unwilling to liberate himself from the lowest, the grossest, the animal within. It is a contradiction in terms. If you want to go to the Ganga bank, you have to leave the

place where you are presently sitting. If you want to go to Rishikesh or Haridwar, you have to leave Sivananda Ashram.

We should recognise the sheer logic of this. We are endowed with intelligence, with understanding, with *viveka* and *vichara*, with book knowledge and much *satsanga*. How foolish we are if we do not let go of that which is being held on to so that we can grasp something higher, greater. We should ponder well that we have to fulfil a preliminary condition if we are to move on to the next higher step.

It is upon this understanding that we should build our relationship with ourselves—with our human nature, with our senses and their appetites, with our mind and its desires and cravings. *Bhoga* and *moksha* (enjoyment and liberation) cannot go hand in hand. *Tyagena eva amritatvam anasuh* (Immortality is attained through renunciation only). *Tyagat santir anantaram* (Peace immediately follows renunciation).

Only when we understand this will we be starting spiritual life, will we be starting *yoga*—real *yoga*, authentic *yoga*. This is the ABC of *yoga*. *Yoga* is based upon self-management, self-control, *samyama*. Therefore a *sadhaka*, a *yogi*, is essentially a self-managed person—in possession of oneself, not possessed by oneself, not a puppet. Understand this in all the ways that it should be understood.

God bless you to ponder this truth, to work upon this truth, and to begin to realise its logic, its indispensable necessity, its importance, and its incalculable benefits. This will take you towards your greater benefit and your highest welfare.

54. THE OVERCOMING OF ONESELF

Gurudev has awakened us to the pearl of great price, the supreme value. He has shown us a sublime and higher ideal to live for which brings a great, lofty significance to our life. There is a deep meaning and a lofty, sublime purpose behind life. Life is not existence, not striving, not survival; life is attainment, it is achievement, a glorious culmination.

When this is understood and realised, life becomes worth living. Each day becomes full with deep significance and meaning. Each day becomes an adventure, as it were, in the overcoming of oneself and the overcoming of seemingly adverse circumstances which are, in truth, opportunities to help us to overcome ourselves.

Such overcoming is indeed the greatest of all victories. Overcoming others may not be too difficult. Status, power, authority, wealth, superior personality, domination, strength—ever so many factors—can help one. And there are also urges to overcome others, such as ego-trip, prestige, self-satisfaction, a peculiar type of irrational, illogical sense of achievement. But all these factors—which in the ultimate analysis are hollow, non-productive and negative—are not there in the overcoming of oneself.

There is no question of privilege in the overcoming of oneself. One is only too conscious of how hollow one is. More than anyone else in the whole world, one is only too acutely aware of one's own defects, one's own drawbacks, imperfections and insufficiency. The whole world may see a golden image. The golden image is aware of its clay feet.

Where there is introspection, there is humility. Where there is deep and sincere self-analysis, there is a true appraisal of one's own inadequacy. And out of this appraisal, out of this realisation of one's inadequacy, springs the urge for overcoming, for working diligently, for perfecting oneself.

If, lacking introspection, analysis and humility, one sees only all that is good in oneself, then all evolution, progress, self-overcoming and self-improvement comes to a stop. One becomes complacent and self-sufficient. There is no greater risk and danger in the spiritual life than such complacency and self-sufficiency. It is a great bar, a hurdle that has to be overcome.

Out of this realisation of what one truly is springs forth a great desire, a great determination and strong resolve: "No, I shall overcome—not anything outside of me, but everything inside of me that needs to be overcome. It will be 'do or die.' I shall overcome and I shall succeed come what may. For that is the only purpose for which life has been given to me. I shall not rest until I have succeeded, for I know that the perfection that has to be achieved is already within me. I have to rediscover it; I have to uncover it; I have to activate it; I have to manifest it. This is what life is. Therefore, I have not far to seek, but I have work to do!"

Seeking, questing are words used for lack of more suitable words. They are words taken from the context of the external space-time dimension of one's life, where, when one loses something, one has to find; one seeks here, there, everywhere. Lacking other terms, we make use of these words also in regard to the mystical inner dimension of our spiritual being, even though they do not convey within the same meaning that they convey in the outer dimension.

There is no seeking. There is nothing that is lost. Everything is found. Only we are not aware that it is there. There may be a finding, but there is no seeking. If an old grandfather has pushed his spectacles up on his forehead and then hunts all over for them thinking he has lost them, he needs to discover or be told: "You have not lost them. They are right there." Even so, you have only to rediscover, to remember, recollect, remove this Self-forgetfulness. That is the situation in the spiritual life.

Therefore, indeed, this is a mysterious inward journey, an attainment of a thing which has never been non-attained. For you are the Being whom you are seeking. You are already That which you want to be. But great effort is required to discard the persistent wrong idea that you are something else.

And the essence of this is the word persistence. You have to persevere and you have to persist. If you stop breathing, in a short time you will cease to exist biologically. Even so, to put an end to Self-forgetfulness, to the alienation of oneself from one's own true, essential, eternal Self—to discard the hollow, erroneous wrong notion of a spurious, transitory, non-existent identity—effort should be kept up in an unbroken stream of a newly awakened consciousness.

In the depth of your own newly awakened self-awareness (where time stops and you are permanently yourself) this parallel, inward, unseen stream has to be there—dynamic in its continuity, non-stop in its unbroken flow—at all times, even while eating, drinking, sleeping, working, or resting.

Towards this end are all teachings. And they call it the highest knowledge. The highest knowledge of a being is knowledge of one's own Self. Therefore, one needs to be awake among sleepers, vigilant among the heedless, ever active among the slothful, living in a perpetual dawn and day where night has no place.

And, in this effort great overcoming is necessary to push away the persistent recurrence of habitual contrary thinking in the wrong direction. That is all. The awakened higher self has to stand in contradiction and opposition to the petty lesser self which rules the interior at present due to the momentum of past habit carried over through births.

There should be the cessation of this stream of error and the springing up of the fountain of truth which must rule the interior in an unbroken stream ever moving towards its source, the great ocean of *satchidananda*, that is here and now.

May the grace of the Supreme and the loving benedictions of the Master grant you the gift of this life of ever-awakened awareness, so that your life may be full of light, so that you may really live!

55. IS DENIAL OF SELF-EXPRESSION DOING VIOLENCE TO ONESELF?

Worshipful homage unto the supreme, eternal, unchanging Being, the one transcendental and absolute Cosmic Reality, that is the Being worshipped in and through all the living religions of the world, the Being glorified in the scriptures of all the living religions, the Being who is honoured, adored and worshipped in all places of worship, the one non-dual God behind and beyond all religions. May His divine grace guide you in your life's journey to its destination and destiny. May He ever make your entire life and all the movements of your life a constant, unceasing, ever-progressive process of trying to approach nearer and nearer to that Being in awareness.

For this is an inward journey of the Spirit. Its direction is not outgoing. It is an extraordinary journey whose destination is already there where you start your journey. For He is the omnipresent, ever-present, immanent Reality, who is more to be discovered and experienced than to be reached. It is a journey that has no arriving or reaching, but a journey of knowing, a journey of progressing degrees of awareness of ever-presence. It is a journey without movement.

It is a journey only in the sense that it covers a time period as all journeys do. There is no linear dynamism here. It is a growth of awareness. It is like a dim light that gradually becomes brighter and brighter and brighter until it reaches its full potential of dazzling radiance. It is like a sleeper awakening. When he awakens, he is not fully out of sleep; sleep still persists. There is half

awareness, drowsiness, and then gradually, ultimately a state of full awareness when there is no more sleep.

And that process may take place or it may not take place—as you will it. If you start with the awareness that there is a need to awaken, then you are on the road to fullest wakefulness. If you hug your slumber, then not all the forces in the universe can awaken you.

But then, the seed of this urge to awaken was sown by the Supreme—*yamevaisha vrunite tena labhyah* (He whom the Self chooses, by him the Self can be gained. To him this Atman reveals Its true nature). It is not anything that you can do that brings you this wakefulness. That Being reveals Itself to one It chooses. So even *subheccha*, aspiration, *jijnasa*, seeking, is a gift of the Divine. This awakening, this urge to *satchidananda*-consciousness is the movement of the God within you, not you.

As long as you persist, you hamper the movement of God within you. Therefore, it is not without reason that Saint Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of Italy, ended his simple prayer with the most significant line, “It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.” That is, it is in dying to the little self that we attain to everlasting life. Death of the little self is indispensable and essential for everlasting life, which means that the life of ego-consciousness is not life. It is a contradiction of everlasting life. Therefore it is that the great master Jesus said: “Whoever clings to his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life shall save it.” Thus, let us pray that we may die to live.

Beloved and worshipful Holy Master Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji had this to say about this gradual process of dying to oneself: “Within you is hidden God. Within you is Immortal Soul. Within you is fountain of joy. Within you is ocean of bliss. Kill this little ‘I’. Die to live. Lead the divine life.”

Who is this that has to do the killing of the little “I”? It is your own inner being, *vichara yukta buddhi*, *vivekatmaka buddhi*, the higher self, the higher understanding, the awakened intelligence, the purified intelligence, *suddha buddhi*, the pure mind. Therefore, they insist upon *chitta suddhi* (purification of the mind). There is within us both light and darkness. We must usher in the dawn of day within our consciousness, our interior, make it perpetual day through awareness.

There is a very popular and significant saying among the young people of the West nowadays: “Let go and let God.” When that is *yoga*—the renunciation of the constant and continued manifestation of the age-long ego-process— that constitutes renunciation as well as restraint. The ego constantly seeks manifestation, seeks expression, wishes to affirm itself, make itself felt. And denying this expression is the commencement of the process. “Let me be a servant of Your servants.”

Is it not doing violence to oneself if you refuse the natural urge to self-expression? It seems so. But, it is violence if you do it in spite of yourself, if you do it unwillingly, if you do it half-heartedly, if you are compelled to do so. Then it is violence; it can bring about psychological conditions. But if it is done joyfully, knowing that the greatest thing that can happen to the *jivatman* is the cessation of the ego-consciousness, this is the greatest renunciation.

The erroneous notion that one exists, one is, and the failure to perceive and recognise clearly that God alone is, that there is nothing else besides that Being constitutes the essence of the ego. And the renunciation of this false notion is the essence of renunciation, *tyaga*. Here there is no violence, because you want to do it. You know that it is your highest good. You take keen interest. You do it with great enthusiasm, with immense awareness and understanding. You do it with an awakened insight that herein lies my highest good—that I cease to be and God is.

That, therefore, is a greater self-expression of an awakened awareness, of a higher I-consciousness—I am part of God. The more I refuse to recognise this, the more I shall ever be apart from God. The more I recognise this, the more I will know that I am a part of God, I am never apart from God. It is the expression of the awakened consciousness, the real “I”, the real identity.

So, far from being a denial of self-expression, far from being a negative state of restraining oneself from self-expression, it is, on the contrary, real self-expression. It is the real expressing of one’s own higher Self; it is the manifestation of the real You. So it is fulfilling, and not denying fulfilment. It is a creative religious process; it is a positive spiritual process. So, it can only lead to elation. It can only lead to rejoicing. It cannot lead to any negative state of denial or frustration. It is, in fact, liberation not restraint.

Therefore, it is not doing violence; it is not suppression; it is not repression. It is liberation; it is the higher state of expression of one’s awakened consciousness, one’s true Self, one’s real identity. Therefore, all along it is a positive and creative process. It is a movement forward not backward. It is not stagnation, not a denial of movement. It is dynamism in a higher sense, but not upon the human plane. It is a vertical ascent of the Spirit towards ultimate, true fulfilment. Knowing this, one engages in the process. One is ever in a state of fulfilment.

This has to be engaged in with patience, with diligence moment by moment, movement by movement in and through our actions—verbal, mental and physical. Life must become then a glorious movement of the Spirit towards its fulfilment.

This is *sadhana*. This is *yoga abhyasa*. This is the life spiritual in its deepest depth—a journey without movement, a journey that is inward, a journey which is of the nature of a growth. It starts from the point where you have to arrive, because both coexist. God is now, here, not something to be reached, remote and far. God is something to be known, someone to be known and experienced wherever you are at any given point in time and life.

May this vision be bestowed upon you by God, who is grace, and may we obtain all the help that we can from the wisdom teachings of sages and seers who have come here to make us aware of the ever-present fact of the oneness of Being. May the benedictions of the saints as well as the light of their wisdom teachings make us aware of this truth, the Reality. This is *sat-vidya*, the science of Reality.

H. INTROSPECTION

An essential part of what is known as *yoga*, or *sadhana*, or spiritual life is transformation from that which is base and gross into that which is sublime, subtle, refined and pure. It is a transformation from the mere human to the Divine, from the purely mundane or secular, into the spiritual.

This process should be consciously made to prevail. If outer *sadhana* is accompanied by this inner process, then it is being done in the right manner and will have the desired effect. Our sentiments, emotions, thoughts, feelings, reactions should undergo this transformation. They must begin to partake of the quality of the Spirit.

Therefore one should always keep checking up on oneself: Is this inner transformation taking place within me? Day after day, as I do my *japa*, *puja*, *upasana*, *svadhyaya*, *asana* and *pranayama*, is this process of essential alchemy taking place within my inner being?

56. TAKE RESPONSIBILITY: INTROSPECT

If you want to know anything about yourself—the pattern, the conduct and the quality of your life—you have to search yourself, you have to examine yourself. For, all change for the better, all transformation starts from self-examination. Without self-introspection no progress, no attainment is possible. Towards the end of his Twenty Important Spiritual Instructions, Gurudev instructed us to do daily self-analysis and to keep a self-correction register. This means know yourself and correct yourself.

The first and foremost reason for your sorrow, your problems, troubles and sufferings—and the troubles and sufferings you cause for others—is you. You have to learn to take responsibility, to squarely look at yourself: “No, it is not something or someone or some other circumstance that is responsible. I am responsible. It comes from me.”

Recognise this! Recognise that Lord Krishna has spoken a home truth when He says that one is one’s own friend and one is one’s own enemy. What He said is correct. “Here it is that I have to find a cause. Here it is that I have to correct myself.” Then all things will fall into their proper place.

Ponder this. Try to know how important it is. Do not remain a baby always trying to find some other reason for what is wrong with you, always attributing it to someone or something else. Say: “No, I won’t go outside to find what is wrong. First and foremost let me look inside. Let me take responsibility and correct myself. Everything will be all right then.”

Therefore, grow up, be mature, be bold, take responsibility. First look within and then talk about other things. If this is your attitude then no one can stop your progress. No one can obstruct your steady upward ascent unto perfection. This is the essence of the matter.

The sixth chapter of the Gita tells us that, ultimately, successful *sadhana* is only possible when it is supported by *vairagya* (dispassion). And successful *vairagya* is possible only through self-examination, self-analysis. Otherwise, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE. Unless there is alertness inside, wakefulness inside, vigilance inside, and keen self-searching—every day, at every step, in everything that you do and think, in every reaction and action—*vairagya* is not possible.

Vairagya has to be supported by your vigilance, alertness and self-awareness upon this inner dimension of your psyche. Then alone *vairagya* can be present in your life, and your *sadhana* will succeed. And *vairagya* cannot be given to you by your guru, nor by God, nor by any sage. They can inspire by their example but they cannot give it to you. This is entirely something that the *sadhaka* has to work for and keep on working for with all vigilance, all alertness, all awareness, all wakefulness.

There is no sleeping for the true *sadhaka*. Therefore, be wise and engage in self-culture, attain Self-realisation and become self-blessed. God's and Gurudev's blessings will shower upon you automatically.

You know why you are doing something. And if it is against your whole life, your principles and ideals, it is bothersome. And, no one wants to be bothered. So, you conveniently try to curtain it off, turn a blind eye, put it out of sight so it won't bother you. This is what the mind does. It will not allow you to see yourself straight in the face and accept and admit what the real motive is behind what you are doing. Therefore, always scrutinise your inner motives.

57. ALWAYS SCRUTINISE YOUR INNER MOTIVES

Prompted by the Divine, we share during these morning hours whatever is meant to come to you at this point in your life. It is from Him that all sound, words and thoughts arise. It is He, who entering into the inner being of man, awakens the dormant power of Sarasvati, the Goddess of knowledge; and what He means to give that alone can be given.

And each one receives a declared truth according to one's inner state, according to one's own clarity, sincerity, earnestness, integrity, depth of inner understanding and subtleness of grasp. You all know the Upanishadic story of a *deva* (celestial) and an *asura* (demon) going to Prajapati, Brahma, to receive knowledge. The same *upadesa* was given to both and each one grasped and understood it according to his own inner state. This is an eternal truth. It is a fact that does not change.

So what a declared truth will be to an aspirant depends entirely upon what the aspirant is. And sometimes the mind is extraordinary. It only takes what it wants and very conveniently bypasses or leaves aside what it does not want. In the positive sense—like the swan separating the milk from the water—this is very good. But sometimes it works the opposite way. That which is good, but may not be very convenient or palatable, is conveniently bypassed. This is the mind. One must try to understand how it operates.

In his Song of Karma Yoga, Gurudev has emphasised and repeats: “Scrutinise always your inner motives.” This is indispensable if a *sadhaka* wants to progress. Because the mind is always very deceptive. You may engage in an action which may seem to be very good, virtuous and praiseworthy, but you alone know your motive. Or, you may not know. If you do not scrutinise your inner motive, you may be deluding yourself, deceiving yourself. You may not know.

Therefore, Gurudev told us to do daily self-introspection, self-analysis, to scrutinise our inner motive. It is not enough if an action appears to be praiseworthy to the world that sees with an untrained glance. They may praise you. But have you come here to collect the praise of foolish people who have gross sight, who do not go deep into anything? You are a trained *sadhaka*. You must have an in-depth understanding of yourself and scrutinise: “Why did I do that? What was my hidden intention?” The inner motive and its hidden intention will not be easily visible. Therefore it has to be scrutinised. “Scrutinise” means to look intently, with an intention to find out.

A passport officer scrutinises a passport. A bank teller scrutinises a big denomination note. They look intently with an intention of discovering. And Gurudev said: “*Always* scrutinise your inner motive—always.” Then you will be the gainer. Otherwise, you will be the loser. You will go deeper and deeper into wrong even though being regarded by all as being very righteous. For instance, sometimes we may do charity or are kind to someone for an ignoble ulterior motive; maybe we want to gain control over the person we are helping.

Therefore a hundred per cent alertness, wakefulness, vigilance, integrity and honesty with oneself is indispensable for the spiritual progress of a true *sadhaka* if he wants to go higher and higher, to attain something beyond the petty things of this mundane world. Therefore, always scrutinise your inner motives.

It may be difficult. It requires *tyaga* (renunciation) also. It requires the continuous *tyaga* of that which is merely pleasant, attractive, palatable. Then alone it is possible. If you have that inner strength, if you are a true *sadhaka* of the Nachiketas type, then alone it is possible to do this continuous renunciation. Leaving home and coming to Rishikesh is a big act of renunciation; but that is only the beginning. Here the real inner renunciation starts.

It is a continuous process until the very last breath— every moment, every step. It is not easy. No one wants to do it because it is not pleasant. Sometimes it can be positively painful. You have to be at war with yourself. Then alone this continuous renunciation becomes a habit. It becomes your second nature. It loses its difficulty. It becomes natural, instinctive. There is no longer any problem.

If you have this spirit of *tyaga*, then renouncing the pleasant becomes possible. *Tasmat etat trayam tyajet* (Therefore, one should abandon these three—lust, anger and greed). That means you must go on renouncing that which is standing in the way. But, first of all, you must recognise: “There is something standing in my way.”

If my motive is not clear, it is a dead obstacle, an iron wall, in my way. This must be clearly recognised and seen as such. Then only your attitude towards it will change. “Nothing which is of a base, unspiritual motive will be allowed to prompt me to take an action. This I determine. Nothing

that is against my principles, my *sadhana*, my divine life will be allowed to prevail in me as a motive for any action I engage in. And I shall see to it that I scrutinise, look keenly and make sure that my motive is as pure, holy, lofty, noble, sublime and sacred as my goal—God.”

Therefore, let us always keep in mind this great injunction of Gurudev, and always scrutinise our inner motives. Let us thus be wise, save ourselves from harm, and rapidly progress towards the Goal!

58. ASK YOURSELF A PLAIN QUESTION

Just think for awhile. Suppose you are alone—maybe on the banks of the Ganga or walking in the jungle or in the silence of your own room—and you put yourself a plain question: “What exactly am I? Am I an extrovert or an introvert? Am I a self-controlled person or a self-indulgent person? Am I a well-wisher of all beings or do I have negative intentions and motivations towards others? Am I a *paropakari*, putting the good, happiness and welfare of others before myself, or do I habitually look after my own interests first? Of course, I try to do good to others, but that is my second consideration, not my first one. If I refer to the Gita, am I of a *daivi* or *asuri* temperament? Is my disposition *sattvic*, *rajasic* or *tamasic*? What exactly am I?”

Have you ever thus queried yourself about yourself and tried to come to some understanding, some definition, some opinion about yourself—impartially, frankly, in an objective, impersonal manner? Only if you do this will you know if your actions are genuine, real, or just sort of an appearance put on. Because it is not difficult to deceive ourselves, for there is a faculty within us called fancy which can lead us to believe something about ourselves which is far from the truth.

Let us be charitable. We are not hypocrites. We are not deliberately wanting to deceive anyone or are we pretending on purpose. Unconsciously we are all on our own little ego-trips. Every day we are upon the launching pad and we fire off the rocket. We want to go up high above and be something unique. If your ego-trip is harmless and just makes you feel good, one can be tolerant and say that that is okay. God does not hold it against you, nor does *maya* or the law of *karma* hold it against you. But unfortunately, most of these ego-trips are very dire. They are not innocuous, harmless. They are not just in the subjective realm of our own fancy about ourselves.

Many of these ego-trips are terrible sources of suffering to others. They can even be such terrible sources of mental torture that the person who is a victim, who is on the receiving end, may commit suicide. And all the while the person who is the source of this terrible torture does not at all think that they have done anything wrong. Because we do not see or experience ourselves as others see or experience us.

Therefore it is important to ask: What is my real disposition, totally devoid and shorn of all pretensions? How am I disposed in my silent inwardness, unknown to others? Unless we ask these questions, which Gurudev has urged us to do each day, we will be to a large extent strangers to ourselves. For our mind is outward going; it knows and observes things outside, but is a stranger to our inside world.

Therefore, what is our essential disposition? And what ought to be our essential disposition? It ought to be a thing of joy and beauty forever. It ought to be a prolific source of unending good to others. It ought to be *satyam, sivam, sundaram* (truthful, auspicious, beautiful). What ought to be our essential disposition? The simple answer to this question can also be found in our ancient wisdom heritage where they have declared that our real essential nature is no other than that supreme, transcendental, all-full, all-perfect, all-beautiful Being. We are as invariably, inextricably, inseparably related to It as a leaf to a tree, as a ray to the sun, as a wave to the ocean, as a note to a symphony.

Well, now you know what your disposition ought to be, what your thoughts, speech and actions should be if they are to be genuine, true, real—not an abnormality or aberration. Your real essential nature is no more, no less than God. Divinity is your real essential nature. This is enough to tell you how you should live; it is the sure unerring signpost on the road to your divine destiny.

Thus, Blessed Divinities, hold on to your real essential nature. Then your disposition will take care of itself. It must take care of itself. If you constantly strive to root yourself in your real essential nature then your disposition will automatically be what it should be. You will be a thing of beauty and joy forever. You will be a true, noble representative of God on earth. That is your mission.

You can do it. You must do it. That indeed is real *sadhana*—ever being rooted, aware of, and manifesting your real essential nature. Your *sadhana* need not be confined to one place, one *asana*, one altar, one corner of your room. It requires none of these trappings. At all times, wherever you are, this *sadhana* goes on. It is a spontaneous, ongoing *sadhana* of living your life as it ought to be lived, as God made you to live it.

If this *sadhana* goes on side by side with your specific personal *sadhana* then who can come in the way of your attaining perfection and liberation in this very life? No one can. You have deserved it and it is yours.

59. METAPHYSICAL INTROSPECTION

Where else will you seek for God except here and now? Somewhere else, some other time is all *bhranti* (delusion). There is no some other time. There is only eternity where there is no time. That is the only truth, the only reality.

Now and then, here and there are created by your mind, which is *maya*, the net in which you are caught. Instead of being ever aware of the ever-present, omnipresent Divinity, we focus on time which says that God is not here, you have to strive for Him.

This is because we talk glibly of the Upanishads; we never study the Upanishads. Who studies even the first Upanishad, the Isavasya Upanishad—the smallest, easiest and simplest one? That one Upanishad is enough to know that you are constantly living in the presence of the Divine. It is near; It is far. It is within; It is without; It is everywhere. It is the one and only fact.

To reveal this one great truth, our ancestors not only declared: “*isavasyamidam sarvam yat kincha jagatyam jagat* (All this whatsoever in this universe that moves or moves not is indwelt by the Lord),” but they also proclaimed: “*sarvam vishnu mayam jagat* (All this is pervaded by Vishnu)” and “*sarvam khalvidam brahma* (All this is verily Brahman).”

They wanted to remove from our mind this peculiar mental delusion that we have to go in search of God in some remote forest or mountain cave. If you go there, you will just find that all you get are all the hundreds of memories, imaginations, fantasies and thoughts that you have in your mind.

You do not have to move from place to place to go to God. Gurudev said: “Why do you search in vain outside? Be silent and know that within you is the I AM God.” He is always saying: “I AM. O man, why go hither and thither? I AM. Listen, I AM.” That is what God is constantly saying, but we turn a deaf ear because we are busy listening to the clamour of this world and its powerful *mayaic* attractions.

God is calling, but this truth is cast aside. And the wonder and the pity is that it is not cast aside by atheists, agnostics, people of delusion or those steeped in worldliness, but it is ignored by serious *sadhakas*, devotees of God, spiritual seekers and aspirants. You put a distance between yourselves and the ever-present God unthinkingly, because *maya* will not allow you to think properly—with keen discrimination, with keen self-analysis.

You never take a look at yourself. You don’t dwell upon yourself to find out the state of your interior, the state of your consciousness, with what vision, with what *bhava* you are living each day, each hour. Introspection is not just to find out your faults and correct them. Introspection is also meant to know yourself, your inner metaphysical content, your spiritual content. If we do that, then we will be able to know what is to be done.

Each one has to find out for oneself why one refuses to acknowledge the ever-present Truth, why one refuses to see. Then alone one can correct this defective vision. Sometimes it is an unwillingness. Sometimes it may be due to the consequences that would arise out of such a perception. It may be uncomfortable, inconvenient. Sometimes it is not that. There is earnest and sincere desire to perceive, but old habits die hard. It is difficult to uproot certain habitual ways of perceiving things. Or, the circumstances, the environment, the atmosphere, the surroundings in which one lives pushes one into a wrong perception or into persisting in a wrong perception. Wrong perception is already there. We are born with wrong perception, and we are fed and grow up with wrong perceptions. Therefore, one has to work at it very diligently and keep on working at it until they are eradicated.

Therefore, we should be keenly observing and analysing at each step. We should also take recourse to *satsanga* and diligent daily study of the scriptures. We should try to keep the company of such people in whom there is this type of awakening, this type of right perception, who are also similarly plodding along this path, who are spiritual people. All these are helpful processes for succeeding in eradicating this wrong perception, this wrong approach which blinds us to the self-evident truth which is central to the great Vedic vision and experience.

Thus we should strive to progress in spiritual life, ever moving closer and closer to this grand vision of the ever-present Reality. Then we begin to open up a new phase as we literally begin to live, move and have our being in God. We live in God and God lives in us. We and He are more closely related than anything else and anybody else.

This great truth should become the basis of your living, your *sadhana*, your spiritual life and your ongoing, constant, prevailing consciousness. That is the fruit of *sadhana* and *svadhyaya*. That is the ultimate reward one gets from one's entire spiritual life. It is meant to create this inner state, to bring about this orientation—when the *sadhaka* becomes God-centred, when the *sadhaka* dwells in constant light.

All *sadhana* is aimed at creating this transformation in consciousness. Therefore, do this and try to experience and make into fact the last line of Gurudev's Universal Prayer: "Let us abide in Thee for ever and ever." Then and then alone this line will hold some meaning for us.

And to this end you should earnestly and sincerely strive to be aware that it is His presence that fills all creation. Be aware that each moment you should try to live in that all-pervading, omnipresent Divinity. That is divine life. That is the inner core of spiritual living. That is the inner core of all *sadhana*, *yoga*, devotion and spiritual knowledge.

Part Three: The Path To Liberation

A. THE SUPREME VISION OF SANATANA VAIDIKA DHARMA

In the context of Sanatana Vaidika Dharma, the ideal of *paropakara* (doing good to others) has been raised to the highest point. It shines as the supreme ideal of life and the living of it. So much so that they even said to the individual soul: “O man, you have been given this body in order that you may engage it in doing good to others.”

Vyasa reveals this secret in the brief aphoristic saying, “*paropakarah punyaya papaya parapidanam* (Doing good to others is virtue and harming others is sin).”

If you want to make yourself the highest, fittest receptacle for receiving the supreme knowledge that liberates, then cast away your egoism and become a doer of good—expecting nothing, wanting nothing, selflessly, egolessly—in a supreme spirit of total dedication. *Nishkama paropakara* (selfless service) is the secret of obtaining *brahma-jnana* because it is the only process by which the ego can be eliminated totally. Then there is no longer anything that obstructs the dawn of the fullest manifestation of divine knowledge in you.

60. THE VEDIC VISION OF LIFE

Worshipful homage unto that Reality in whose presence we are gathered together at this moment and in whose presence each one of you lives at each and every moment of your entire life. Whether you recognise it or not, whether you realise it or not, whether you know it or not, it is an unalterable fact that you verily live in the presence of God every moment of your life.

The Vedic vision of man and view of life makes one fearless. It makes one recognise one’s deathless immortal nature, one’s imperishable divine nature—beyond name and form, transcending time and space, without birth and death, supreme, unborn, eternal, imperishable, permanent, never changing.

Established in this view, convinced of this truth, the true follower of the ancient Vedic way of life is fearless. Such a one laughs at death; he knows that death has no meaning for him. It may apply to this physical cage of flesh and bones in which he is imprisoned for a little while, in which he dwells for a little while, but he is ever ready: “Let death come. What do I care? I shall receive it with joy and exit from here exulting in the shedding of the confining limitation of this physical body.”

Thus, fearlessness is the interior of a being who is established in the Vedic vision of himself, the Upanishadic vision of himself. But, nevertheless, he is ever prepared to utilise life to the very fullest for the highest blessedness of himself and for the highest good of one and all: “We are but

passing pilgrims here. Therefore, let us do maximum benefit to God's creation in which we live and through which we pass."

Thus, there is only this one great intention, one great objective, one great thought: "Let me be a centre of maximum benefit and blessedness to all beings around me." That is the true Vedic ideal of life—to live and be in this world, not for oneself, not for anything else, but for the highest good of all and the supreme blessedness of oneself.

The follower of the Vedic view accepts life as a great gift. He knows its value, and he tries to utilise it for the highest attainment and for the maximum good of one and all. Therefore, he combines a robust and most practical pragmatism with the highest transcendental idealism—absolutely fearless, laughing at death, knowing that it has no meaning, but absolutely aware of the great worth and value of this brief sojourn and passageway.

"I know that everything is transitory, temporary. I know that all my connections are ephemeral, momentary. Nevertheless, while they are there they are meaningful, very significant and invaluable. Therefore, I shall grasp life with both hands. I shall say 'Yes' to life with all joy in my heart, and I shall put every faculty that I have received from God to the highest and best use, having but one view—the happiness of all, the good of all, the service of God in man, the service of the manifestation of the Universal Soul as the Virat Purusha, the Cosmic Being."

Thus, there is at once a down-to-earth reality and the highest supreme flights of transcendental idealism—a strange, unbelievable combination, but, nevertheless, a most wonderful and most beautiful combination. Caring neither for life nor death, knowing that it is the same; ever prepared to journey forth, to finish this game; but, knowing very well that not all are fortunate enough to be endowed with this insight, with this higher vision; therefore, with great compassion, recognising the relative reality of this earth appearance, this world show, for those who are still in *avidya*, in *maya*, in *ajnana*, one plays the game of life with great *dakshata*, with great expertise, ever a source of help and service, of solace and happiness, of peace and harmony, of love and friendliness, of sharing and giving, of encouragement, of all that is true, auspicious and beautiful, of all that is divine, for you are divine.

Thus the Vedic vision and insight grants us the supreme privilege of fearlessly moving through life knowing that we are ever free, but, at the same time, most beneficially moving through life with universal goodwill and a ceaseless, selfless giving of oneself for the happiness of one and all. This is the strange and beautiful end-product of the rightly recognised value of the supreme experience of the Vedic sages.

May you all live life endowed with this knowledge and vision, with this inner light and insight, and thus live to enrich God's creation, enrich the life of each and every one whom the Supreme Being brings you into contact with. Be a light in the darkness! May God's grace abide in you!

61. THE HARMONY BETWEEN GRACE AND DIVINE POWER

The advent of great spiritual teachers who come with a guiding light to lead mankind from misery to joy, from *asanti* to *santi*, from ignorance and bondage to illumination and liberation is the working of cosmic grace. They are a manifestation of divine grace.

In the context of the Indian philosophy of qualified non-dualism, whose greatest exponent was the great *bhakta-vedantin*, Sri Ramanujacharya, the Divine Mother is regarded as the symbol, the very embodiment of that divine grace. Even as Jesus said, “No one can come to the Father except through Me,” even so the devout qualified non-dualist will say: “It is impossible to attain the feet of the Lord except by the benign grace of Divine Mother Lakshmi. It is only if you surrender to Lakshmi that She, through Her compassion, takes you and graciously presents you before the supreme Narayana.”

In contrast to this, in eastern India, in Bengal and other places, the Divine Mother is regarded as the great cosmic Power. The Saktas regard Her as *Adi-Sakti*, the primal Power, as *Para-Sakti*, the transcendental Power, as *Maha-Sakti*, the great Power. It is She who has brought about the multifariousness of the phenomenal existence of countless universes. And so it is the Divine Mother’s power that is the object of worship, the highest supreme factor in spiritual life and liberation. She is the grantor of liberation in the context of the Sakta philosophy.

Is there a conflict, a self-contradiction, in these concepts of the Divine Mother, who is the dynamic aspect of the actionless, supreme *para-brahman* who, being all-full, is beyond all action? Can these views be harmonised, reconciled and shown to be perfectly valid and tenable with no element of self-contradiction? Can the concepts of grace supreme and the great intelligent power that brings about everything in a marvellous way—creating, preserving, destroying, guiding, binding and at the same time liberating (binding as *avidya maya*, liberating as *vidya maya*)—be reconciled? Yes, they can be.

Even the very high, superfine, penetrating intellectual analysis and the keen perception of recognising the true need of a *guru* and becoming aware that you are recognising such a need can only come when grace makes you aware that there is no one standing in your way except yourself: As long as the “I” in any form, whatsoever it may be, persists, that itself becomes the one factor making liberation a far cry. Even this penetrating, very subtle analysis is also an exercise of *sakti*.

Because *sakti* need not necessarily be something gross, something external. It is *sakti* alone that enabled Albert Einstein to expound the Theory of Relativity. All exercises by great thinkers are manifestations of the Divine Mother. It is *sakti* in a very highly subtle form, but it is *sakti*. It is not only the movement of the hands and feet and the body that constitutes an exercise of force, but even the subtlest of all Vedantic enquiries is also but a manifestation of the primal *sakti*.

Therefore, it is grace working—in the form of this inner movement towards light, towards immortality and liberation. It is grace working—in the form of your penetrating analysis, your discrimination, *viveka*, and enquiry, *vichara*. Thus, you find that the movement of power within you and the concept of grace in your life seem to be identical. They perfectly coalesce to form a certain twin stream of the same plenum.

The ultimate declaration of the Yoga Vasishtha, the Bhagavad Gita and of all modern teachers is: “Liberation does not come to one who longs for it but fails to implement his longing in the form of self-effort.” Self-effort is a manifestation of *sakti*. It is what they call *purushartha*. The will to *satchidananda*, the will to fulfil all the conditions, everything that is required to be done for liberation, is a manifestation of *sakti*.

All *sadhana* is a manifestation of *sakti* and grace combined. Whether it is *jnana yoga sadhana* or *bhakti yoga sadhana* or *karma yoga sadhana*, it is at once a combined manifestation of grace (what is it if it is not grace; if it is anything at all, it is grace) and the Divine Mother as a dynamic movement towards liberation.

Here they perfectly harmonise. There is no contradiction. They are two-in-one. Both are equally present. At one time, this grace looks like dynamism. At another time, the dynamism is felt and known to be grace. *Uttishthata jagrata prapya varan nibodhata* is a rousing call for *purushartha*, to stand up, be awake and do all that is necessary to attain illumination. It is a call to manifest *sakti* within you, and responding to that call, standing up and shaking off the slumber of ignorance is a manifestation of grace.

It is only when grace is there that when the call comes one responds. If grace is not there, even if this call is blared into your mind and heart a hundred times, it will be a mere call in the wilderness. No one will respond. However, if grace is there, it manifests as immediate wakefulness, immediate needful action.

We are the product, therefore, of this mysterious, indescribable combination of these twin factors of grace and dynamism. And in the ultimate analysis they are not two. They are but two aspects of one. Divine activity proves the presence of grace. Grace manifests as divine activity.

And the source of all this is the indwelling Divinity within you—your eternal companion, your never-failing guide, friend and philosopher, who is ultimately known to be your own Self. All power, all grace reside within you as the centre of your spiritual being. You live, move and have your being in that Being. And that Being ever indwells you as the very centre of your existence, as your *antaratma*. This is a great mystery. We should ponder this great mystery and become the field for the play of this *sakti*, become the field for the manifestation of Its grace.

The manifestation of these twin factors, two-in-one aspects, is fully manifest in the life of each and every one of you. That is why you happen to be here considering these lofty, sublime truths. Had it not been for grace dynamically manifest in your life, you would not be here today. Just think of it! Just think of it!

62. THE INDIAN HINDU EXPERIENCE OF THE PERSONAL GOD

Worshipful homage unto the supreme, imponderable, transcendental Absolute Reality, whose manifest personal aspect is an ocean of compassion and forgiveness, an immeasurable ocean of justice, love and mercy. The personal cosmic Spirit Divine is sometimes hailed as Grand Mercy.

It is addressed as *kripa-nidhana* (a treasure house of kindness), as *daya sagara* (an ocean of mercy or compassion).

The Impersonal Absolute may be transcendental Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute, but the uniqueness, not so much of Indian Hindu philosophy and metaphysics, but of the Indian Hindu experience is that it not only experienced the Great Reality as a transcendental, absolute Truth—non-dual, One without a second—but at the same time it was also revealed to it that the Unmanifest can and does also become manifest; the Impersonal can and does also become the Personal for the sake of the sincere seeking soul caught in the tangle of desires and longings and lack of discrimination and enquiry.

Falling into this pit of ignorance, the human individual laments when it realises its blunder and calls out for help. Due to its handicaps and limitations, it cannot get out of the entanglement into which it has fallen. Therefore, Someone from above has to bend low and extend a hand to grasp the hand of the one who is struggling to get out of the pit.

There is a painting of God—a great Being with a flowing beard, ancient, hoary, ageless—extending a hand with a finger pointed out for His human family to grasp and thus be saved. Had the Impersonal not also been a great Cosmic Person, whose name is Grand Mercy, having infinite love, compassion, grace and a feeling for our helplessness, man would not have as his concept of God one who will run to his rescue, who will help and save him. Man cries out to God in extremities, and God answers and comes to his rescue.

And thus, the uniqueness of the ancient Indian Hindu experience was the coexistence of the Impersonal Absolute—the transcendental Reality—and the manifest Personal Being—a relative Reality to which one can relate oneself in terms of a beautiful spiritual relationship, mystical relationship.

The narrative of the Srimad Bhagavatam Purana is but a recital and exposition of the mysteries, beauties and the variegated, compassionate activities of this manifest Personal Divinity. Even when seemingly Its love and grace manifest itself as avenging wrath, even then, underneath this seeming avenging wrath is compassion.

This subtle point is brought out in the story of the destruction of Hiranyakasipu by the man-lion Personal God, Narasimha. After tearing open Hiranyakasipu's abdomen with His claws, He also tears open his heart. Do you know why? He was looking for some factor in this wretch that would make him deserve mercy—forgiveness from the hell fires which he fully deserved. He was looking for some redeeming feature: Is there one iota of kindness or compassion in his heart?

Therefore, symbolically, He wanted to find some reason to let him off, something that would mean that he didn't deserve total punishment. He was in search for something on the basis of which He could manifest His mercy, His compassion. Thus, even in this seeming retribution, vengeful act, He was trying to find some reason, some cause or excuse for exercising compassion.

Thus, in the most mysterious, non-understandable manner, the manifest Personal God of the ancient Indian Hindu experience is ever working in order to bend down and grasp our hands and

take us up out of the self-created bondage, self-created net, in which we are caught. For in the ultimate context, the Lord never punishes, the Lord never destroys. The Lord is never retribution. We heap coals of fire upon ourselves by our acts.

There is a saying in Hindi that one need not fear either God or the devil. What one has to fear is one's own actions—mental, verbal and physical. We must be aware of our own actions. If they are auspicious and good, we have nothing to fear. If they are of a contrary nature, *we* bring destruction upon ourselves; *we* bring terrible consequences upon ourselves.

No one punishes. We create our own punishment. We create our own retribution. We create, ultimately, our own spiritual destruction. If there is *durbuddhi* (evil mind), it becomes our destroyer. If there is *sadbuddhi* (virtuous mind), grace, salvation and liberation are sure and certain. They are as sure and certain as the sun rising in the east and setting in the west.

Api chet suduracharo bhajate mam ananya-bhak. Sadhur eva sa mantavyah, samyag vyavasito hi sah. Kshipram bhavati dharmatma sasvacchantim nigacchati. Kaunteya pratijanihi na me bhaktah pranasyati (Even if the most sinful worships Me, with devotion to none else, he too should indeed be regarded as righteous, for he has rightly resolved. Soon he becomes righteous and attains to eternal peace. O Arjuna, proclaim thou for certain that My devotee is never destroyed).

Thus, if even the most fallen of beings turns around, mends himself and turns towards the Lord, he must be regarded as a holy person, and he will never be destroyed. Soon he will become a good man, full of *dharma* and then attain supreme peace. The Lord gives this promise.

This is God. God never punishes man. There is nothing to fear from God. He is love, compassion, justice, all goodness, all auspiciousness, all blessedness. But we create our own difficult situations by our own folly, by our refusal to receive the wisdom teachings of the scriptures and the saints, seers, sages and *gurus* who are our greatest well-wishers.

So, let us realise this and go to the scriptures for light and wisdom. Let us also walk the way of light and wisdom and bless ourselves forever by our own right actions, by our own righteous living and by our own divine life. Be it so!

Thank God that in Kali Yuga mental sin is not taken as a karma. Otherwise, we would all go to hell. But because of God's great compassion, He has so ordained it that in Kali Yuga mental sin is not counted against a person. It is the grace of God. Wrong thinking is not counted against you, because although you harm yourself by harbouring such wrong thoughts, no harm is done to others. Therefore, it is not considered as sin.

But such is His grace, that in Kali Yuga if you think of doing good to someone, it is a mark in your favour, it is counted as a merit. But any evil thought or wicked intention is not taken as a minus. Otherwise God knows where we would be.

63. THE LIFE BREATH OF SANATANA VAIDIKA DHARMA

Worshipful homage unto the great, eternal, all-full and all-pervading Reality that is the one immediate fact of our life! That one great Reality is absolute and non-dual; It is present everywhere as all that exists. That great Reality is not something remote, not something inaccessible, not something unapproachable, not something unattainable.

Its immediacy, Its omnipresence, Its attainability was very touchingly brought home to us by beloved Gurudev in the concluding words of his song, Immanence of Ram: “Approachable by faith, devotion and prayer is Ram. Accessible through *sraddha*, *prem* and *bhakti* is Ram. Attainable through *japa*, *kirtan* and meditation is Ram. Goal ultimate of one and all is Ram.”

That great Reality pervades everywhere like the light of the sun pervades this solar system of ours. It indwells all things as their immanent principle just as space is present everywhere. All the great religions proclaim these truths. The Vedic religion declares: “*isavasyamidam sarvam yat kimcha jagatyam jagat* (All this whatsoever in this universe that moves or moves not is indwelt by the Lord).” Islam declares: “The Light of Allah dwells in the created human being.” Christ said: “The Kingdom of God is within.” Judaism teaches: “God created man and breathed His spirit into him.”

The breath of God, the spirit of God, indwells created beings especially so the intelligent creature called man. It dwells in him as that principle which makes this human creature know everything, cognise everything, solve the mystery of all things.

Therefore, the Upanishads declared that this principle of knowing, by which man knows all things, shines at the centre of his being—*prajnanam brahma*. It is that by which the eye is able to see and you can recognise form and colour. It is that by which the ear is able to hear and you can distinguish sounds. It is that principle by which you are able to feel and smell. It is that, lacking which all senses would be as non-existent. By That alone the mind is able to think, the heart is able to feel and the intellect is able to reason, enquire, analyse, discriminate, investigate and move towards knowledge. That principle verily is Brahman.

It shines in the spiritual heart as the first knowledge, the primal knowledge. Before you can cognise anything, before you can know anything, you first know: “I am. I exist, therefore I know.” The ancient Upanishadic seers said: “Without a knower, knowledge is not possible. The fact that we know something proves beyond the least shadow of a doubt that there is someone who knows.” They realised the central, most immediate fact: “I exist and I know that I exist because I am there knowing it.” The consciousness of existence is the most immediate and primal manifestation of *prajna*.

This primal self-awareness is known as *bodha*. *Bodha* is awareness of one’s existence, knowledge. When one awakens one is in that state: *nitya suddha*, *nitya buddha*, *nitya mukta*, *nitya paripurna atma*. You are the eternally pure, spotless *atma tattva*, the eternal, pure knowledge, eternally awake and aware. In this form, therefore, *brahma tattva* shines within us as the light of Allah, as the breath or spirit of God, as the ever-present immanent Reality, the one great, tremendous Fact. And that immediate, all-pervading, omnipresent, indwelling Reality is peace, is

that which can never be effaced, which is eternally present. Other than That nothing else exists. It is all that is auspicious, blessed and beautiful, and It dwells within you as the one and only thing present therein.

This knowledge is knowledge. Anything else other than this is ignorance. All knowledge that interferes with this one and only knowledge is ignorance. To know this is to free oneself from the thralldom of what they call *samsara*, *prapancha*. To know this is to become instantly free. Attaining That one becomes full, perfect, liberated from all sorrow. One attains fearlessness and freedom, the supernal state of *paramananda* and indescribable peace.

The great ones spoke of *sadyo-mukti* (instant liberation); they spoke of *jivan-mukti*. Not without reason because they were in that state. When they entered into this light of awareness, light of knowledge, *jnana jyoti*, that very instant they were liberated and free, engulfed in light and peace and joy.

The experience of this Reality is central to that religion we call Sanatana Vaidika Dharma. It is the very essence, the very life breath, the very soul and the central fact of this great way of life, this great view of life, this great state of knowledge. It is a state of illumination, of enlightenment, of basic, fundamental knowledge. It is a state of ever-present experience.

That Light of Consciousness is the eternal Reality; it is the Light of lights which shines beyond all darkness. It shines in the centre of your being as the very core of your own consciousness. It shines within you as the unaffected witness of all things that take place before It, both within and without in this drama called life.

May that great Reality, to which we pay homage every morning, shower grace upon you and manifest Itself as this effulgent wisdom awareness. May peace be unto you and the joy of this state of illumination, which is coextensive with Sanatana Dharma, which *is* Sanatana Dharma, ever abide in you.

64. THE GREATEST DISCOVERY OF OUR UPANISHADIC SEERS

Worshipful homage unto the supreme, eternal Cosmic Being, that pervades and indwells all things and whose mysterious, inexplicable and incomprehensible divine power creates, preserves and dissolves countless universes each second, and whose same incomparable power casts, as it were, a veil of non-perception or a veil of delusion over all created beings, so that the Creator who shines amidst them all, who is nearer to them than anything else, who is dearer to them than all things put together, who is more their own than any other single thing created by the universe, that Being is not known.

Being closest to us, we feel Him not. Present everywhere, we perceive Him not. This non-perception, this situation, this strange, extraordinary, inexplicable phenomenon has been given the metaphysical term *maya*. Due to *maya*, the ever present in not recognised, the ever proximate is

regarded as being remote, far off, to be reached only with great difficulty. Thus we search for that Being who is ever found.

What exists is One without a second—*ekameva' dvitiyam brahma*. One and one alone and non-dual is that great Reality, eternally existing, ever present, infinite. There is no second, there is one and one alone. Whatever exists inheres in that One without a second.

The term *maya*, therefore, is only a term to describe an extraordinary, inexplicable state of that Universal Being, which being one and non-dual is everywhere present, yet is not recognised nor comprehended. This state of imperfect consciousness is designated as *maya*. It is nothing but a mysterious something emanating from Brahman Himself. It is His effulgence that seemingly hides that radiant, effulgent Reality.

The relevance and importance of this great discovery of the Upanishadic seers and sages is that it tells the seeking soul that there is no problem outside of him. There is no obstacle obstructing his path apart from him. There is no such dichotomy as God and Satan or Allah and Saitan. There are no twofold eternal principles such as Jehovah and the Devil. You are not to contend with anything outside of you, because there is nothing outside working against your liberation.

Whatever is is within you. All problems emanate from within you. All solutions are to be sought and found and applied within you. Everything is there. Only perceive. Open your eyes and perceive. This makes one fearless. You do not have to fear a devil, fear a malefic, malevolent power which seems to be so powerful that one cannot escape.

You do not have to tremble. You do not have to fear. You do not have to run to take shelter in any other power. There is no need to attribute things to the work, to the diabolical machinations, of some being who is as mysterious as God, seemingly all-powerful and who holds all created beings in its grip and thralldom.

Such a concept is non-existent in the context of the Vedic religion. Even the dichotomy of *dharma* and *kali purusha*, the power of righteousness and the spirit of this Iron Age is only a temporary concept—a provisional working method, something to start with. Even the dichotomy of *daiva* and *asuri sampada* is only temporary.

So, they say: “Wake up from this dream. You are never bound. You are never imperfect. You are *nitya suddha*, *nitya buddha*, *nitya mukta*, *nitya paripurna*, *anandamaya atma tattva*.” What a tremendous discovery this is! What a bold and brave assertion this is! What a great truth! If you ponder it, you are inspired, you are filled with exultation, you rejoice immensely. How can there be any imperfection in me? How can there be any weakness in me? How can there be anything but one hundred per cent pure Divinity in that which I am. I am ever free, ever full, ever pure.

This is to be fully grasped and absorbed. This is why Gurudev in his bold, positivist utterance said: “Come, come! Liberation, perfection, bliss is your birthright. Why do you prolong your bondage unnecessarily? Supreme perfection and divine experience are your birthright. Claim your birthright right now, at this moment, not in the distant future.” In these bold words, in this

rousing manner Gurudev affirmed this wonderful fact that there is nothing that can prevent you from achieving that which is yours already.

There is no power on earth, no power in this universe, that can come in the way of your affirming your reality, of your asserting your fullness and perfection. It is yours! Only, you have to shake off lethargy, shake off negativity, shake off indifference and wake up, stand up and boldly claim your birthright and be what you are, be what you already are.

Therefore, focus your mind upon Brahman. Then *maya* will disappear. The moment you take your mind away from Brahman you are in *maya* with all this delusion, all these problems and complications, all the woes of the *jivatman*. All these miseries arise because we do not seek to know the ever-present Reality by daily introspection. We are so busy with the world around us that we have no time for the world within. Almost all transformation, almost all commencement of a new life begins with self-searching, self-examination, introspection. If this is not done, we will never get anywhere. All *sadhana* is ultimately putting an end to unnecessary negative thoughts, dismissing them as nothing, empty nothings.

The ultimate call, the ultimate admonition, the ultimate *upadesa* has been given as: *uttishthata jagrata prapya varan nibodhata*—Arise, awake and attain illumination. Do that now! Take refuge in the Supreme: *mameva ye prapadyante mayam etam taranti te* (Those who take refuge in Me alone, they cross over this illusion). And pray: O Thou One without a second, Thou supreme, non-dual Being, remove from Thy face this inexplicable, indescribable power of Thine, so that I may perceive Thee.

May the Supreme Reality shower grace and reveal Itself, not in the distant future, but right now, here, at this very moment! May the benign *guru kripa* of the all-loving and gracious Holy Master Swami Sivanandaji grant you success in this discovery—in this Self-discovery!

We have to seek the causes for our problems within. We also have to seek for solutions within. Lord Krishna said that one is oneself one's own enemy in certain conditions, and one is oneself one's own friend and help. Therefore, you have to become your own uplifter, and you should not fail to do so.

Get up from whatever state you have landed in. No one has put you there. You yourself landed in that state. Now, get up! That is the thing to be done. That is the one thing needful. Be keenly interested in your own highest blessedness, and make your life successful, fruitful in attainment.

65. LIFE IS UPHELD BY SACRIFICE

This entire life on earth is made possible by sacrifice. All life on earth is made possible by this process of self-giving, the offering of oneself for the benefit of the whole.

The rain that is falling outside is the direct result of the giving of themselves on the part of the rain clouds. This *yajna* or sacrifice in the sky is received as water by the parched earth, which in turn gives of its very essence in the form of all the grain and fruits and vegetables and grass that nourish and keep alive all creatures on earth.

Thus, the offering of the clouds in the form of essential rain brings about a sacrifice on the part of the earth in the form of food. This offering of the clouds is made possible by the self-offering of the ocean waters, which give of themselves in abundance, limitlessly, boundlessly. Thus is this earth upheld by sacrifice. Each part gives of itself for the benefit and the happiness of all, for the life and the living and the survival of all.

And, if you offer yourself to the Lord who is more than all—He is all in all—He looks to it that He offers Himself for you, and then there is nothing that He will not do for your sake. He will not only liberate you from all that binds you here—all sin, all blemishes, all imperfections, all error—but He will liberate you forever by the offering of Himself in the form of liberation, emancipation, divine perfection. This is the eternal promise: If you offer yourself up to Me, then verily I offer Myself up to you.

Thus life is pervaded by the spirit of *yajna*, the offering of oneself for the benefit of everything else. Life is upheld, life is benefited, life is made possible, life is blessed by the spirit of *yajna*. One who realises this truth that prevails in human life and who keeps up this chain of *yajna* is wise. Benefiting everyone, that individual benefits oneself.

Breaking this chain, contradicting this law, becoming selfish and self-centred, wanting the world to offer everything for one's benefit is a sad mistake that ultimately results in one's own stagnation. Because, *yajna* is an ongoing process. It is a perpetual movement towards peace, joy and perfection. In reversing this process and wanting all creation—all persons, things and situations—to work for our benefit, to offer themselves up for us is a blindness, is a state of putting oneself in contradiction to the whole law of life, to the working of the will of God.

When one does that one invites for oneself misery, restlessness, disappointment and frustration. All these result from one's lack of understanding of this great glorious central fact of life that our highest good lies not in wanting the universe to serve us, but in serving the universe.

Therefore, our ancients taught us not to pray for our own good, plenty, auspiciousness and blessedness, but for all, for others. May all be happy! May all be prosperous! May all have plenitude! May all be free from suffering! May all behold that which is auspicious! May not anyone have sorrow! May all have peace! This is an expression of the recognition of this great law, this great fact—*yajna* or sacrifice.

Therefore, Lord Krishna taught us that if you wish for happiness, work for the happiness of others. If you wish for peace, work for the peace of others. If you wish that God would do everything for you, then do everything for the love of Him.

What you are, that the world is to you. Recognise this great truth, this great law, this great spirit of *yajna* that pervades the universe. Then, by harmonising yourself with this law, you are

indeed on your way to the highest blessedness. By living and working in tune with this spirit of *yajna*, you bless yourself tenfold, a hundredfold.

B. THE UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF THE SUPREME TRUTH

All scriptures proclaim the omnipresence of God. All the great *stotras* and chants proclaim the presence of God in all names and forms. They all grandly proclaim this glorious truth. Nevertheless, knowing this truth, chanting and uttering this truth, our actual life and actions day by day do not demonstrate this truth.

How difficult it is to remember this truth, to retain it and to make it the basis of our being and doing, our living. How easy it is to shove this truth into some corner of our knowledge and very conveniently go our own way refusing to see the God who is standing before us—ignoring Him, shoving Him aside. Strange contradiction! Strange dichotomy!

This is the reason that the ship of our life does not reach the other shore of Immortality. This is the reason why, in spite of *japa* and meditation and scriptural reading and pilgrimage and vows and austerities, we don't seem to be making any headway. We are pressing upon the accelerator and putting on the brake at the same time. Sometimes we even put the vehicle into reverse.

Ponder this truth, this strange fact pertaining to your life and your spiritual life. Knowing, being and doing must be integrated. We must realise that this integration is necessary. We must strive for this integration. We cannot be split personalities in the spiritual field.

66. BRAHMAN IN TIME AND SPACE

We are told that the supreme, ultimate Divine Reality baffles thought, reasoning and human language. It is transcendental, beyond time and space, unmanifest. How can we, bound up in a consciousness limited and confined by time and space factors, depending solely upon an inner instrument made up of mind and intellect, how can we ever hope, ever have the possibility of comprehending that great Reality?

He being unutterable, imponderable, it would seem to be impossible. Nevertheless, those who have scaled the tremendous heights of the realisation of the Absolute have suddenly discovered when they have come down from the dizzy heights of super-consciousness and supra-consciousness—the dizzy heights of a transcendental experience absolute, *aparoksha'nubhuti*—another facet, another aspect, another truth about that great Reality.

And this has been a discovery so great, so wonderful, so tremendous and significant for us, for you and me and all of us, that it would be the greatest thing if we could grasp it, live in that truth

and base our *sadhana* upon that truth. It would make a revolutionary change in the quality of our spiritual life.

And that second facet or aspect that they experienced and which overwhelmed them they have shared with us. It is the truth that the supreme, almighty God, the absolute Being, Brahman, who is transcendental, absolute, imponderable, beyond mind and intellect, eternal, infinite, boundless, unfathomable, immeasurable is at the same time manifest in the relative and finite dimension. Otherwise, there would be no possibility of our spiritual quest, of our aspiration, of *guru* and *sisya*, of *sadhana*, of *yoga* and meditation or the consummation—realisation. All these things would be impossible.

And what these great men of wisdom discovered was that this transcendental Being, beyond time and space, infinite and eternal, when manifest in time and space is YOU. Ponder this! Transcending time and space It is that Brahman. When that same Brahman is manifest in time and space, that great Brahman, that Divinity, that perfection, is YOU.

Therefore, be what you are. Live life as a manifestation of what you are, namely, Divinity. Live such a life. Scatter divinity in everything that you do all the days of your life. And when the time comes, go laughing, laughing at the so-called termination of this earth incarnation—not smiling, but laughing. For it has no meaning for you. It has no meaning. There is no termination. You are eternal, infinite.

Therefore, be what you are. Be awake and aware of this great fact that God, Brahman, manifest in time and space is no other than you. Live as you are. Make your life a manifestation of your truth, of this fact.

Live your life filled with a radiant divine quality. Live with joy. Live with light. Spread this joy and light each minute, each moment, with each breath, everywhere, all the days of your life.

Then go forth radiant, joyful, triumphant, victorious. Thus is life to be lived. That is indeed life. This has been said.

67. THE CENTRAL PURPOSE OF ALL SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Worshipful homage unto the eternal Reality that is also a present reality, because eternity includes the past, the future and also the present. If a thing is beginningless and endless, it automatically also becomes present every moment in this timeless eternity. The endless cannot be absent at even a single split moment in time. Therefore, when we pay worshipful homage unto that transcendental, eternal Being that transcends time, we immediately affirm that transcending time He is always present. He is omnipresent. Therefore, it is not that we are drawing near to Him when we walk towards a temple or a church or a mosque, we're walking towards Him even when we step out of the temple or church or mosque and walk towards our home. In all that we see, hear, taste, touch and smell, in all that we think and feel, in all that we do in thought, word and action, we are moving towards that Supreme Being.

Better it to be said that there is no moving towards the Supreme Being. In all that you do mentally, verbally and physically, you are doing it in Him, for you exist with Him as your eternal ground. When a beautiful, long-stemmed flower is put in a tall vase filled with water, not only does the water-filled vase support it, keep it upright, but the life-giving water supports its life, keeps it fresh and blooming. Even so is every creature created by the Supreme Being. Every creature on earth, every form of life derives its life from God who upholds it. Because it is in God, it also lives in God for God is life.

God is the source of life. If you are alive, it is because of His living presence within as life itself. He is *satchidananda* (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute). He is Existence; therefore, you exist. You think, feel, move and are vitally alive because He is within you as *chit*, Consciousness. And, if only you will maintain the purity of this inner essence of your being, learn to abide and to be aware, and to keep a continuous stream of this abidance and awareness as your life breath, then you will find that you also abide in Bliss.

For, this pure essence of Existence and Awareness cannot be anything but the distilled quintessence of absolute, unadulterated Bliss, for all other relative experiences, all other dual experiences, pertain to the dimension of the intellect, mind and body, to the plane of the physical and psychological, which is always subject to change because this is a world of transience and a world of the pairs of opposites—sweet and bitter, pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow—whereas the essence of your being has nothing to do with this dimension, for it is not in the relative, not in the frame of time-space. It is in the noumenon whose essence is Existence and luminous, radiant Consciousness that is aware. Nothing is hidden from It. As such It is *jnanasvarupa* (the embodiment of knowledge); It is gnosis; It is omniscient precisely because of this truth about Its being.

Hold on to That. Be in that centre. Know that you are ever centred in It; you are rooted in It. It supports you. It is your beginning, middle and end. It is your all-in-all. You abide in It the same as all things that exist abide in It.

And in this transcendental dimension of the noumenon, the fitful, feverish flux of relative experiences have no approach. The entire range of earthly human experiences being confined and limited to this relative plane, that which transcends it is totally free. Therefore, It is not just Existence and Consciousness, It is also unutterable Bliss. Those who experienced this therefore declared: “Brahman prevails as Bliss and Bliss alone.”

And you ever are rooted in this Bliss. You ever abide in that Bliss. In your true essential being, as the spiritual essence, you ever abide in that Bliss. If you recognise that you are essentially pure Spirit, then instantaneously you will recognise that you abide in Bliss. Therefore, the importance of knowing yourself: Instantly, you know that Bliss alone is real, that sorrow does not exist.

And to this end, all the great philosophers, teachers and masters of wisdom have tried to tell you who you are, have tried to introduce you to your real Self, *nija svarupa*, even as Adi Sankaracharya does in his *Vivekachudamani* where he teaches how to separate the Self which you are from the non-Self which you are not.

This separation of the Self from the non-Self is not something that suddenly happens. You have to gradually lead yourself up to it by a constant non-stop process of affirming the Self and rejecting the non-Self as not being your identity. The non-Self may exist; it may prevail everywhere. That need not bother you. But you don't exist in it. Therefore, don't feel that you are one with that part of God's creation, but identify yourself with your true Self. Then even while being in this plane of multifariousness, in this earth life, because of the inner process of separating yourself and affirming your reality, ultimately that consciousness unfolds, opens up and becomes yours, you abide in It.

So, it is the experience Absolute, the experience Ultimate that you have to lift yourself up to as one climbing a ladder rung by rung. When an air balloon that is tied to the ground is untied from its moorings, it rises up. But if you want it to rise higher and higher you have to remove the ballast. Even so, we have to throw out of ourselves all that is unnecessary to this ascent of the Spirit.

So, first you have to untie yourself from the moorings which hold you bound down. This is the inner, hidden form of the outer spiritual practices. Whatever the variegated outer forms of spiritual practice may be, the one central purpose of all these practices is unitary. It is the liberating of yourself from being tied up to this erroneous, wrong, human consciousness, earth consciousness, body-mind consciousness. To liberate yourself from this consciousness and rise up into the true consciousness of your essential spiritual being is the inner, central, single purpose and objective of all the outer variegated forms of spiritual disciplines and practices.

And this practice should be kept up whether you are engaged in some sort of a formal spiritual exercise in your room or whether you are engaged in your daily duties. It does not matter. But you must make sure that as far as you are concerned there is no such thing as being in *sadhana* and out of *sadhana*. You are always in *sadhana*. *Sadhana* should be your continuous, unvarying inner state.

This is the one thing that is needful. Your interior consciousness will ever be in a state of continuous, non-stop, unbroken *sadhana*. It means facing the Reality, moving towards the Reality, abiding in the Reality, and being aware that you abide in the Reality, being aware that you are *sat-chit-ananda*.

May the supreme Eternal Reality bestow the grace of *satchidananda*-consciousness upon you. May this temporary earth existence of our physical and psychological personalities be to us not a bondage that holds us tied down, but the means, the golden opportunity, the field and the framework of thus being in a continuous unbroken state of inner *sadhana*, namely inner *satchidananda* awareness, Reality awareness. May God grant you this gift, and make it possible here and now, not in the distant future!

68. THE HEART OF THE SPIRITUAL PROBLEM

What is the heart of the spiritual problem of the individual soul upon this earth plane, who is in a state of bondage to an earth consciousness, a limited individual consciousness which is referred

to as *jivahood*? It is important to try to understand or to get to the essence of this metaphysical problem, this cosmic problem of the individual soul imprisoned in a structure made of flesh and bones, in a labyrinth, a net, of constant, unceasing thoughts, fancies, imaginations, memories and projections into the future.

These constitute an inner mesh or net in which we are caught and held firmly, for the identification with the psycho-physical dimensions of our personality is so total, so complete, that it has become normal. It has become the one and only consciousness that we know. It has become our natural condition although Vedantic psychology would describe it as abnormal. It is an aberration.

Thus, Swami Vivekananda, trying to make his Western audience understand this subtle, inner metaphysical point a hundred years ago used the term “dehypnotise.” When they suggested that Vedantic affirmations such as “I am Atman, I am immortal, I am without birth and death, name or form,” were only a form of self-hypnosis, he replied: “On the contrary, you have been hypnotised into thinking ‘I am the body, I am a human being, I am so and so, I belong to this family, to this country.’ What Vedanta wants to do is to dehypnotise you from the hypnotised condition you have fallen into through birth after birth of wrong thinking.”

Thus it is that we have to go through a process of trying to discover what it is into which we have landed through ages of wrong thinking. That state Vedanta pinpoints as a state of identification with that which we are not, a total moving away from the centre of our real, natural awareness of what we *are*. Moving away, completely forgetting and becoming disconnected, as it were, from the awareness or from the consciousness of what we really and truly *are*, we have entered into a state of consciousness identifying ourselves and thinking ourselves to be something which we are *not*.

We are immortal Spirit, but we think we are people subject to birth and death, a beginning and an end, a birth day and an epitaph. So, Vedanta precisely pinpoints our situation as this state of forgetfulness of our real nature and being totally caught up, entangled and overcome by a wrong awareness, an identification with a personality consciousness which is not our real consciousness.

Out of this wrong identification has arisen a false ego-sense, and we are held in bondage to this wrong, vitiated consciousness dominated by ego and totally pervaded by selfishness which is the outcome of ego and which leads to a self-centred, self-seeking life. This is the present malady. And, this condition seems to be our real, natural condition, whereas it is a diseased one. It is called *bhava-roga* (disease of transmigration).

The bondage of earth life is not outside you. It is not made up of anything other than your own self. It is not the outer world perceived by the five senses that constitutes *prapancha* or *samsara* or earth life. It is this inner state of becoming completely deprived of our true awareness and becoming enslaved by a wrong consciousness dominated by a false ego and further complicated by selfishness that is the natural immediate outcome of the ego and its attachments to so many things.

It is this wrong awareness of ourselves, this self-centred, self-seeking life that is the root cause of all clash and conflict with others, differences of opinion, disharmony, discord, prejudice,

bias, hatred, misunderstanding, envy, jealousy, suspicion and anger. Everything stems from this basic state which constitutes your *bhava-roga*. *Bhava-roga* is not outside, it is inside. *Samsara* or *prapancha* or *bandhana* (binding) are not outside, they are inside.

Therefore, the first process is to somehow or other clearly perceive this. Because, as long as you do not clearly perceive this and honestly accept this state of yours, *kaivalya moksha*, liberation and illumination are all far, far away. They are only so much of fancy. They are only a vapour of imagination. We must clearly perceive this state, and we must be honest enough to admit this very painful truth about the actual inner state of our consciousness.

It is not at all flattering, but unless there is honesty about oneself we cannot step into spiritual life even if we know all about Vedanta. For the spiritual life has two dimensions. One is the Vedanta *siddhanta* (doctrine) of the ultimate experience, but the other is *vyavahara* (worldly activity). Unless Vedanta is brought over into *vyavahara*, it is only a burden to us.

Siddhanta is useless unless it is brought down to the level of *abhyasa* (practice), and takes the form of *sadhana* in day-to-day living—in your everyday activity, thinking and feeling, reaction to things around you, and your relationship with others with whom you have to live. These have been provided by God Himself for the *jivatma* as a field of *sadhana* so that *siddhanta* can be applied, so that one may begin to move towards Truth-experience, Reality-consciousness.

Unless we understand our position in *samsara* to be thus, unless we see it as a gymnasium in which to exercise and strengthen our inner spiritual sinews and muscles, we are the losers. We shall ever be in a wonderful field, yet we will not be able to take advantage of it, because we will be thinking that *sadhana* is somewhere in a forest or inside a cave. It is inside a cave, but the cave is inside us.

We must see very clearly that it is here, it is now, it is in this way that I have to evolve. There is not going to be another opportunity given. If we fail to recognise and bypass the opportunity that God has given, then we are losers. Every moment, every day that dawns is a great, golden chance and opportunity given. The field is immediately reopened afresh for you to exercise practical Vedanta, for you to put *siddhanta* into *abhyasa*. This constitutes practical spiritual life. It is the practical aspect of Yoga and Vedanta.

69. BY WHAT LIGHT IS CONSCIOUSNESS KNOWN?

In ancient times, your ancestors went upon a great, extraordinary, unique quest, a quest after the unknown, the unseen, a quest after that which is hidden and occult, behind and beyond the seen and the known. They went into a quest after this unknown something, not knowing what it was or even whether it existed.

What was the need of going in search of something whose existence they were not sure about? The need was because they discovered that all that is seen, all that is perceived by the five senses, is temporary, changeful, unstable, perishable, subject to decay and dissolution; they saw

that everything that is beheld is in flux. They also saw that everything has a beginning and an end, is limited in space, and unreliable because of its changing nature.

They felt that this was unsatisfactory and they wanted to know: “Is there something which is permanent? Is there something that is changeless, imperishable, eternal?” Thus they commenced this extraordinary quest into an unseen inner realm that to them was strange. They became explorers who chanced upon a great discovery in the course of their quest. They discovered that indeed there was such a thing as they were searching for, something beginningless, endless, changeless, imperishable, permanent, beyond time and space, eternal and infinite.

That they declared to be the Reality, OM TAT SAT, the eternal beyond the non-eternal, the unseen reality behind and beyond the seen, passing unrealities, the imperishable and indestructible behind and beyond all that is perishable and subject to decay, dissolution and destruction. And because that was the state of the light of awareness and knowledge, they called it the great Light of lights beyond all darkness, the source of all that shines. It was the causeless cause, the sourceless source, the eternal.

That discovery and experience they left to posterity for all times. And that Light has never faded because it is an eternal light. It is That that is upholding today in this world of ours all that is lofty, sublime, pure, noble, worthy, holy and sacred. It is the essence in an otherwise essenceless and also senseless human existence that is characterised by birth, death, old age, disease, decay, hatred, violence, unrighteousness, criminality, falsehood, dishonesty and vice.

In this darkened state of affairs of present day humanity there shines this Light and you are that Light. Your life, your human status is a rare opportunity and occasion to rise beyond this darkness and come into the dazzling light of Self-awareness, the dazzling experience of the effulgence that you are.

Long ago, in bygone ages, to show us step by step the way to that Light, a teacher asked a disciple: “Beloved student, by what light are all things here seen?” “Sir, it is by the light of the sun.” “Beloved student, when the sun sets and night falls, by what light are all things perceived here?” “Sir, by the light of the moon.” “When it is new moon day and no moon shines in the sky, by what light are things known here?” “Sir, by the light of the stars.” “And upon a dark, cloud-filled night in the middle of monsoon, when no moon or stars can be seen, by what light does one perceive things here?” “Sir, by the light of a fire.”

“And if one descends into a cellar on a dark, moonless and cloudy night and the light you have is blown out by a gust of wind, everything is plunged into total darkness, then by what light are things perceived, by what light do you know that you are in a cellar, that there is a staircase that you have descended and that there are four walls and other objects there?” “Sir, by the light of the previous memory of these things seen before.”

“Beloved student, who is this perceiver who through memory is able to recollect things, to see with his mind’s eye? Who is that being? By what light are things thus perceived by the mind’s eye? What is that light that makes one aware when nothing is seen, nothing is perceived—no name, no form—nothing is known to exist even though the eyes are open? What is that light?”

“It is the light of consciousness—a being who is conscious of things even when nothing is perceived, a being who is aware. What then is the essence of that being? It is awareness, it is consciousness. That thou art. Thou art that light of consciousness that needs no other light to know, for it is the essence of knowing. It is knowledge absolute, and it is beginningless and endless. That is the great Reality, the Truth, Brahman, the Light of lights beyond all darkness. It alone is real and That thou art.”

When we are in a state of non-perception of that Reality, when the seen alone is real to us, when the many alone is real to us, when the unseen, the one and non-dual is not the reality to us, then—in this state of spiritual ignorance, of spiritual non-perception—it is a crucial question for seekers and spiritual aspirants to know by what light That is to be known.

It is a crucial question, and that light is the light of truthfulness. It is by the light of truthfulness that It is known. One who is truthful knows the Reality. That light is the light of purity. One who shines with the light of purity becomes the all-pure Brahman and knows the great Reality. That light is the light of *dharma*, the light of righteousness. One who worships *dharma*, one who tries to follow *dharma*, comes to realise Reality through the light of *dharma*.

Therefore, truth, purity and righteousness are the blazing torch that leads the seeker upon this pathless path that ultimately leads to illumination, enlightenment, realisation and liberation. This, therefore, is the light by which we should illumine our life until we attain the great goal of merging into that Light of lights beyond all darkness. This is the light that illumines the life divine. It is the light that is enshrined at the very centre of the shrine of divine life—truthfulness, purity and righteousness in daily life.

We offer our worshipful homage and heart’s gratitude to that great Reality that has given us the gift of this morning hour that we may ponder these eternal truths that never change, even when everything else may and does change. They are eternal values, and in the changing drama of human life upon this earth plane, in this ever-changing flux of the phenomenal appearance, these are eternal verities, eternal values that abide forever—unchanging, forever valid, forever applicable. May we contemplate this truth and be blessed!

70. UNDERSTANDING THOU ART THAT

When the Upanishads address you and declare: Thou art That, you should be very clear in your mind what the term Thou implies. Then alone, when this is grasped with clarity and subtle receptivity, can you truly and immediately understand what That connotes and how this relationship of oneness, or being the same as, is possible.

If you think that by the vocative term Thou, the Upanishads mean you who are listening with your ears and trying to understand with your mind and grasp with your intellect, then the very purpose of the declaration is thwarted. Because, if to you the term Thou still seems to mean a physical entity, that means that you are still identifying yourself with the body, mind and intellect.

And as long as you are still in that state of understanding yourself, in that state of consciousness, the Upanishads have failed in their mission, for they are not referring to this thou.

When the Upanishads say Thou, they are not using human language but are trying to convey to you a divine experience. They are neither using Sanskrit, English, Hindi nor any other language. They are declaring an experience which is imponderable, beyond the knowing of the mind or the grasping of the intelligence: *yato vacho nivartante aprapya manasa saha* (whence all speech turns back with the mind, not reaching It).

So, if instead of trying to understand the term Thou upon that level—where mind and speech could not enter, they came back unable to comprehend It—you persist in taking it to mean a physical and psychological level, then the inner implication of Thou has not yet dawned upon you. They are not saying that Mr. or Mrs. So and So is Brahman. That is an absurdity. There is a saying in Hindi which means that what you are understanding and what they mean are as different as the earth and the sky.

Therefore, you first have to understand what this Thou is that they are referring to when they declare that Thou art That. They are not referring to the seen you, the name and form you. They are referring to the unseen you. They are not referring to anything whatsoever that is seen; they are referring to you as the hidden, unknown seer of all things seen, the knower of all things known. In that dimension, Thou, the hidden seer of all things seen, art That, that which alone prevails.

That verily is your source, your alpha and omega, your be-all and end-all—You, the unseen. You, who may know the world, but the whole world can never know You. Even your father and mother cannot know You unless they themselves have already understood the true meaning of the terms Thou and That.

Therefore, the need of long study, the need of sitting at the feet of a knower of Brahman and listening to what he has to say about Brahman, about *maya*, about yourself and about your interrelationship. When he expounds on whether *maya* really exists or does not exist and your relationship to Brahman—day after day, over months and years—then you must reflect: “*Guruji* says I am not this gross body and mind. What does he mean? Then, who am I?” You must listen, reflect and meditate.

They say Rome was not built in a day. God is not understood, realised, even in one lifetime, what to speak of a day. Yet they say He can be realised within a twinkling of an eye; it takes no time. How can we reconcile these statements?

If a dry match is struck against a rough surface it will immediately burst into flame. Try doing that with a toothpick on a cake of soap. You can go on striking it all your life and nothing will come because the toothpick does not contain the crucial factor. On the other hand, consider the amount of work and the number of steps that go into the manufacture of a match head. And then it has to be struck against a suitable surface.

Thus, when the interior of a seeker is ready, fully prepared through years of study, listening to the truth and reflecting and pondering over what has been studied and listened to, then,

ultimately, when the Upanishads declare to you Thou art That, you know perfectly well exactly what is implied, what is meant by Thou. You understand that it does not mean this I which you are using in common parlance upon the field of outer worldly activity, but it means the real I, distinct from the three bodies, transcending the five sheaths and not experiencing or undergoing any experience of the changing states of consciousness of waking, dream and sleep.

“I am the unchanging fourth state of consciousness, calmly witnessing the ever-recurring cycle of waking, dreaming and sleep. I am watching; I am experiencing. I am neither awake, nor dreaming, nor sleeping, because I have never slept in order to be awake. Eternally, I have been what I am. I am that I AM. Wakefulness is my name. Awareness is my name.”

It is this meaning that the Upanishads are trying to address. Therefore, it is easy, simple. At the same time it is not easy, not simple. It depends upon how much you have worked upon yourself in order to gradually cleanse and refine your consciousness, raise it from its normal physical, psychological level and keep it upon a supra-physical, supra-psychological spiritual level, divine level—a divine level where inwardly you have climbed Jacob’s ladder and fixed yourself in the Kingdom of Heaven that is within you. Then this heavenly utterance which introduces you to yourself will be grasped and understood. When the word That is understood, then only can its relationship to the word Thou also be grasped.

Therefore, they say that it is the subtlest of all subtle things. You must make your consciousness attain this subtlety. If it is still involved in dualities, in likes and dislikes, joy and grief, and identification with the body, how can that level be attained? You may fancy, you may fondly think, but a fancy is a fancy only, a fond thought is a fond thought only. This is not a child’s play or a child’s game.

One sage said that grasping this truth is like chewing on steel peanuts and digesting them. It is not a little thing. Therefore, there is a need for humility, for clarity of thought, for clearly understanding what this truth is and where you stand. Then, humbly, with patience, diligence and fortitude try to move towards it and keep on moving, moving, moving. Make your life this slow movement— minute by minute, hour by hour, day after day—never changing direction, never changing your objective, never allowing anything to divert you this way or that from moving towards that centre and living in and for that great centre with every breath, every thought.

This is *sadhana*, this is spiritual life, this is *yoga abhyasa*, this is meditation—dwelling on it, contemplating it. Therefore, meditation is every minute, all twenty-four hours of the day. It is not only when you are alone in your meditation room. Meditation is throughout the day and night, even when you are working or serving or in a crowd. If the meditation stops, your *sadhana* has stopped, your progress has stopped.

You may be alone inside your meditation room, but in thought you may be in the middle of the world. Therefore, this is not play; it is not an ordinary thing. It requires humility and a clear understanding of your real identity. Then a positing of the question of Thou is not ridiculous. How can this thou be That? It is not this thou that is meant. It is something that is inside this thou that is meant when they used the term Thou.

Therefore let us fully understand. Let us first assess our present state and see where we are. Then, let us do all that is needful to reach where we ought to be if we want to understand Reality, if we want to grasp the Truth!

71. THE REALM OF 10,000 AWAKENINGS

A couple of generations ago, there was a writer, a great lover of Eastern philosophy, thought and spirituality, who was a frequent visitor to India and Tibet. He used to frequent ashrams, and I remember an occasion when he came to visit Gurudev. The title of one of the books he had written was *The Land of the 10,000 Buddhas*. A significant title!

We know of only one Buddha, the unique historical “Awakened One” who made his advent more than 2500 years ago. He was born in a royal family and grew up in the lap of utmost luxury. It was arranged that his life should be all pleasure—no negative factors whatsoever. Eventually he married a beautiful princess, and they had a baby boy. One could not imagine a more idyllic life.

However, slowly, in an almost natural, spontaneous, unplanned manner, an awakening was brought into his heart, mind and intellect. He saw sights that set him thinking deeply about life and what it constitutes. His whole being was fired up with this light of awakening as he pondered deeply what he had seen and what he had been able to feel and understand.

This turning point launched him into a vast realm of a quest of the unknown. From the lap of royal luxury he took to the forest, a lone wanderer in search of something he knew not what. But he knew that it was a search that should take him beyond sorrow. The path should lead him to supreme blessedness where sorrow shall cease to be.

For he saw this world as a ball of fire—hot within and hot without. There is not an iota of happiness here. It is a place of *tapa-traya* (threefold afflictions): those inflicted by elements beyond our control, those inflicted by other forms of life, and those inflicted upon ourselves by ourselves from within—envy, jealousy, ego, anger, frustration, disappointment, despair, hatred, resentment, dissatisfaction, and a hundred other such inner states.

Such psychological states torment the Being who, in truth, is supremely above and beyond, ever what one is, untouched by any psychological state, the never-changing Reality that is the great stillness, the great silence, the great peace. That Being has moved away from that experience and become embroiled, entangled, involved and totally enmeshed in things that go on in a much, much lower part and aspect of one’s human personality. One moves away from one’s centre and gets enmeshed in the non-Self.

Sankaracharya described this process in his great, illuminating and inspiring work, *Vivekachudamani*. By descending into a state of identification with the non-Self, instead of ever abiding in one’s own Selfhood, the consciousness is made to come into a lower plane through an error, through lack of right enquiry, through lack of discrimination between the eternal and the non-eternal, the Reality and appearance, the Self and the non-Self. And by this root error, this

original sin of identifying ourselves with the non-Self, of moving away from an awareness of ourselves as we are—the ever-present I AM, the Divinity within—and getting involved in this “thing” universe, one allows oneself to become subject to the third affliction, the self-created *tapas* arising out of oneself and based upon this flimsy, non-existent ego. The ego, which is nothing, seems to be everything because of the power given to it by our identification with it.

We, due to our little thinking, make our human personality, which was given to us as an instrument for liberation, the means of our bondage by identifying with its lesser outer physical aspect and not taking the plunge inward as that royal prince, Siddhartha, did when he came to realise that all is vanity, that everything is ephemeral, fleeting, transient, an appearance only. He took a great step. He was assailed by many problems and temptations, but just as the magnetic needle of the mariner’s compass always points to the north in calm and in storm, no matter how the ship is tossed about by wind and waves, so he ever fixed his mind upon the Goal.

Even so, if within your human personality, within your innermost state of identity awareness, you always dwell in the Reality, then there is no bondage for you. You are in a state of liberation even though in apparent bondage.

And this process is a gradual one that has to be initiated and kept up. For the spiritual realm is a realm of 10,000 awakenings. Because the old *samskaras* are so deeply rooted and because they constantly draw one back into the sleep of non-awareness, the sleep of erroneous consciousness, one must keep up the counter-process in an unbroken continuity of ever-repeated awakenings, coming out and becoming aware of the dazzling sunshine of the ever-present Reality, the Truth that ever prevails as the one glorious Fact of this universe.

There is no bondage. Liberation is the only state that is real. It is eternally present everywhere within and without, in every atom. Everywhere, liberation alone is present; illumination alone is present; that great state of perfect, restful Divine-consciousness alone is present. For that is Brahman, that is the Tao, and That is infinite and everywhere present.

Anything else might be cancelled, be declared to be unreal. But this is impossible of being conjured away by the finite mind. It is the one Fact, it is the bedrock of existence. Awakening, awareness, perfection, bliss, joy, blessedness, is the one unalterable Fact of existence, and into That one has to keep on awakening.

So, let us know that we are living in a realm of 10,000 awakenings. For that is what constitutes spirituality. That is what spirituality is in fact. And that is what the spiritual life should be for one who would attain supreme blessedness here and now within this very body.

Awakening is the truth. Awakening is what you are meant for. It is an ever-present experience and it is within and without. The potential for it is in all beings. Fortunate are you who have been given the fullest scope for making this potential patent, evident, and for making it manifest as your own experience.

72. ABIDE IN YOUR SELF!

The innermost part of your being, the very essence, the fundamental, eternal, central principle of your being, is identical with the supreme, cosmic, universal Spirit Divine. It is not in any way different. For the Universal Soul is the source, substratum and fulfilment, the very stuff of the individual soul. But something has been added on to it, so there is a duality. The added factors do not in any way change the divinity of the essential, innermost Divine Principle. It remains the same, unvarying. For it is reality, and reality does not change. Reality is ever the same.

Therefore, there is within you an unchanging reality—that is you—plus an ever-changing, temporary additive which limits your consciousness, makes you unable to feel your reality in all its glory and grandeur, in all its pristine, primal purity. These added factors that limit your real Self are referred to as limiting adjuncts or *upadhis*. They are the five organs of action, the five *pranas*, the five inner organs of perception—sight, sound smell, taste and touch—and the fourfold inner instrument of thought, feeling, memory and intellect.

You must be able to clearly perceive this duality. In this lies the key to liberation and blessedness. In this lies the solution to all the problems that you may be experiencing. For, practically everything that goes to harass, vex, torment, and trouble you is in the part of your being made up of these limiting adjuncts. In your real Self, the inner part of your duality, there is no problem, no vexation, no elation or depression, no complication, no trouble of any kind.

That innermost part is a centre of blessedness, a centre of joy, peace, light and serenity. There you find the cessation of all vexations, all restlessness, all problems, all that makes you suffer, complain, weep and wail. All those things that belong to the outer half of your duality—that vex, harass and trouble you—cease to exist when you reach your inner centre. They do not exist in the real You. They are only the play, the various moods and modes of this outer half.

If you can think deeply about it, and perceive the truth that everything that makes the human being miserable upon this earth plane pertains to the earthly half of this duality only, while the solution to all this—the way of transcending and liberating yourself from all this—lies in the inner half, the eternal, spiritual, divine half of this duality, you will suddenly realise with a shock, a pleasant surprise, that within the problem lies the solution. And what is more, you will suddenly exult in the realisation: “For all the harassments I seem to be undergoing, I am the solution, I am the solution!”

“Not only in this duality of the Self and the non-Self (of the eternal and the temporary, added-on limiting adjuncts) lies the solution, but I myself constitute the ultimate solution—the total, unfailing and only solution. If I practise the *sadhana* of being myself, of abiding in my reality, then I am applying the solution and solving all problems. This one single *sadhana*, this one process will instantly, within a moment, liberate me from everything that constitutes this *samsara*, this *prapancha*, this world and all that this world implies.”

Joy and sorrow, love and hate, pleasure and pain, elation and depression, happiness and misery and all desires and restlessness pertain to the mind, intellect or emotions—to the non-Self, to the *upadhis* or limiting adjuncts. They cannot touch YOU who constitute the positive, glorious half

of this duality. Even while in this state of associating yourself, or being associated with, these limiting adjuncts, you are still liberated in your innermost real identity.

It has no bondage. You have no bondage. You are an ever-liberated being. Bliss is your eternal, unchangeable natural state. Peace profound is what you are at all times, whether waking, dreaming or sleeping. At all times you are immeasurable, profound peace, which means that you are unchangeable divine joy—awareness, joy, peace. That is you, and you hold the key.

You constitute the solution to all these temporary, evanescent, passing, little vexations that go to make up this world. You may not be able to change the world, to alter all these conditions, but you can always be your Self. That does not require great acrobatics. It does not require any intricate, complicated, involved process. It is the simplest of all things.

It is as simple as it is for a rainbow to be colourful, for a flower to be beautiful, for music to be melodious, for honey to be sweet, for sandal paste to be fragrant. It is as simple, as easy, as it is for the sun to be bright, for fire to burn, for water to flow, for the wind to blow, for space to contain everything—for it is your inherent nature. You are That. You are peace. You are joy. You are light.

Therefore, ponder this fact, this truth, that while you may not be able to change the world outside or even what happens in your temporary added adjuncts like mind etc., it does not matter because you can be your Self. For this is natural to you, and this is the most effective of all solutions to all problems. And this solution is called *you*, your own Self.

Be your Self. Abide in your Self. Be what you are and see what it does to you. This is the greatest *sadhana*. This is true religion. This is Yoga, this is Vedanta, this is common sense, and this is wisdom. To search for solutions when the solution is right there within you does not make sense. To be your Self, solve all problems and go beyond them makes sense. Therefore, glorious, immortal Self, be sensible. Be your Self, and it is instant bliss, instant peace, instant fullness. For then you abide in eternity and in infinity.

May Gurudev's hand of benediction help you to perform this inner miracle—the greatest of all miracles. May his glance of grace give you the insight, the intuition to simply be what you are, to be your real Self, to be the Atman, not the *anatman*, to be the *tattva*, not the *upadhis*.

In other words: be bliss, be peace, be radiant light and put an end to this myth and dream of anything else other than the light, peace and joy which is eternally and unchangeably what you are. Be your Self!

73. HOW WE SHOULD APPROACH GREAT TRUTHS

It is good to try to see God in deep meditation. It is good to see Him in a temple, church, mosque, synagogue. It is good to try to understand Him in the scriptures. But all these are mainly meant to be a help to generate in you Reality-awareness, the true, clear vision of the truth that you

behold Him in all things everywhere, every day. If these spiritual practices serve that purpose, they have a place in your scheme of things. If they do not serve that purpose, they are a sheer burden.

Actually, if you think you have done all that is required by meditation in the morning, studying some scriptures and going to the temple, if these practices have lulled you into a false sense of piety, religiosity and spirituality—you think yourself as being a right person doing the right thing—then this is a serious situation. You have to shake yourself out of it, because this is not dynamic and progressive spirituality. You meditate, read scriptures, listen to discourses, precisely to understand what it is that you call God.

There was a period and it has not yet gone from me when I never liked to say the word Brahman. What right do we have to say Brahman? Brahman is That greater than which there is nothing. Brahman is awesome, the imponderable, before which you are struck dumb; the mind stops, words fail. When someone chants “*Sivoham, sivoham, satchidanandoham* (I am That),” I don’t repeat it. I keep silent. Is *sivoham* a refrain to be sung? You have to take your bath, purify yourself, do *pranam*, pray, purify your heart and feelings. Then, in the secrecy of your own room you may utter that word.

The more often you repeat such sacred words, then gradually, progressively the less they mean anything to you. And when great truths lose their meaning to you, then you have to pause, stop short and ponder whether the practice should be continued. Because when things become commonplace and lose their meaning and significance, their power no longer has the ability to transform you. You take it for granted and continue on your usual course.

If you say *sivoham*, it is nice and comfortable. But what is important is that you try to gradually go on uplifting your consciousness higher and higher day by day; because it is to raise your consciousness to that great, sublime height that the truth *sivoham* has been proclaimed. But unless it has been Vedantically taught by a fully realised *guru* and you have been taught how to read the scriptures, how exactly to interpret and to grasp the subtler than the subtlest inner implication of such great truths, then the mere articulation of these truths should be studiously avoided. They are to be pondered in the deep secrecy of your own inner heart.

They say that in order to understand these truths your intellect should be as sharp and penetrating as the tip of a blade of kusha grass. You have to create that type of deeply penetrating *sattvic* intellect through a great deal of devout service, setting aside all pride and vanity, humbly prostrating at the feet of a *guru* who has the fitness to teach the truth, questioning him and becoming fit to grasp these great realities.

Therefore, as we study let us all simultaneously engage ourselves in a purifying and refining process through prayer and meditation, through paying honour to those who are learned, so that we become more and more subtle and pure, more and more capable of grasping the inner implications of these great truths.

And the most blessed of truths, the most important central truth of the experiences of our great sages is God’s all-unifying presence as a common factor present in all His creation, in all His creatures, in everything. And it is this that should be made the basis of your life and conduct and

your day-to-day behaviour with others. Then this type of activity itself will become a spiritual *sadhana* supporting, augmenting, enhancing and enriching your inner spiritual life.

There should be a perfect concord, a perfect harmony between our spiritual *sadhana* and our outer life of being, our moving about in this world and dealing with this world. There should be a constant effort on the part of the *sadhaka* to keep up this consciousness of *atmaupamyā* (likeness of the Self). Then the *sadhana* becomes not only unified, holistic and integrated, it becomes complete.

Such a *sadhana* has the great power and potential to gradually take you into a state of constant God-awareness. And this God-awareness must become to you spontaneous, your second nature. To this end let us all strive!

74. PRACTISE THE GREAT REVELATION

Each day, as you emerge out of your period of silent meditation, you repeat: “*namostv anantaya sahasra-murtaye sahasra-padakshi-siroru-bahave; sahasra-namne purushaya sasvate sahasra-koti-yuga-dharine namah* (Salutations be to the Infinite, who has manifested as the innumerable forms, who has innumerable feet, eyes, heads and arms; salutations be to the One who has innumerable names, who is the Eternal Person, and who holds thousands of crores of ages). All forms are His forms. He has neither name nor form, but, nevertheless, He has infinite forms.

Another *sloka* begins: “*harir eva jagat; jagat eva harih*—This universe is but the Supreme Lord, the Almighty Being, and that Almighty Being Itself is this universe.” It was with this vision that the Lord graced and blessed Arjuna in the unique Yoga of the Universal Form during the course of His Srimad Bhagavad Gita teachings. It is this manifestation that you adore every morning as you come out of your meditation.

Let this adoration be the very inner vision of your life. Let this adoration be a permanent and ongoing spiritual *sadhana* within you. And even as the great Adi Sankaracharya gave to us his immortal line: “*yadyat karma karomi tat tad akhilaṁ sambho tava aradhanam* (Whatever action I am doing, everything is a worship of You, O Lord Siva),” even so Arjuna, addressing the Universal Form, says: “O Thou Supreme Being, O Thou Cosmic Being, I bow to You, I adore You, I salute You from all directions. I salute You above, below, within and without, to the right and left, in front and back. Everywhere I behold Thee. Everywhere I adore Thee.”

That should be the vision with which one begins the day. Let the entire day be filled with this *sat*, filled with this selfsame spirit of adoration, this *bhava*. Then everything that you do will be directly connected with God. All actions—mental, verbal, physical—will be raised to a higher dimension of the Spirit, to the higher dimension of a process directly involving you in the Divine, which your ancient, illumined forefathers, ancestors, discovered to be an ever-present Reality, an all-pervading Presence. And they left for posterity, for global humanity this great vision, this great experience as the most priceless part of their heritage.

God is a now-here experience. This entire experience is summarised and epitomised for humanity for all times in the Isopanishad. The greatness, the grandeur, the vital importance and necessity of the Isopanishad is in this central truth and fact, in this central experience that the Isopanishad tries to expound: the fact that this central experience makes us *isvaramaya*, makes us God-filled. The Isopanishad brings to us a vision and a formula which makes it impossible for the individual soul to escape God. Unless one deliberately tries to alienate oneself from God, it is impossible to escape God.

To forget the world is very easy. But to forget God is very difficult. This is the achievement of the Isopanishad, if only you absorb it, study it seriously, reflect upon it and if you keep the Isopanishad vision, the Isopanishad truth and revelation, in your heart and mind always. It helps you to become God-filled, *isvaramaya*. That is why it was put at the very beginning of the Isopanishad: *isavasyamidam sarvam yat kincha jagatyam jagat* (All this whatsoever in this universe that moves or moves not is indwelt by the Lord). Life is in God, and God is in every part of life. All other things are commentary.

This is the great central revelation of Satya Sanatana Vaidika Dharma. This entire existence, entire creation, entire universe is God-filled, and if the entire universe is God-filled and if you are part of this universe, then you are also God-filled. Deeply ponder this. If God pervades this universe, does He not pervade you? Are you not part of this universe which God pervades? Is it not a logical conclusion?

The great world teacher Bhagavan Sri Krishna also tells us about this central fact of life, tells us about this subtle spiritual truth of the universe: “*samam sarveshu bhuteshu tishthantam paramesvaram vinasyatsv avinas-yantam* (the Supreme Lord existing in all beings, the Imperishable within the perishable).” That should be perceived; that should be seen. One who tries to see that hidden Reality is the real seeker. And one who sees It, he is the real seer. Others, even having sight, they see not, for they fail to perceive the ever-present Reality.

Gurudev concluded his well known Universal Prayer with: “Let us abide in Thee for ever and ever.” If this is to be realised, if it is to become a fact of our day-to-day experience, if it is to become the basis of our inner state, our inner consciousness, then the only possibility, the only way is to practise the Presence in the light of the declaration of the Isopanishad and this statement of Sri Krishna. This is the one thing needful so that we will ever dwell in God. This is to be perceived. This is to be seen.

That is the one way of being *in* the world and yet not being *of* the world. That is the one way of being in the world and yet not allowing the world to come and possess us, dominate us, take charge of us, enslave us. If you do not wish worldliness or the world idea or the fascination of the world to come and establish itself in your heart and make you a toy, a plaything, a puppet in its power, then the one and only way is to already establish God in your heart, so that the world dare not enter; it finds no place. Make Him the indweller of your heart. This should be reflected upon; this should be meditated upon. This truth should be made the basis of our sight and our hearing. This vision should be practised.

That is why Gurudev has put this into three separate lines of his Universal Prayer: “Let us behold Thee in all these names and forms. Let us serve Thee in all these names and forms. Let us abide in Thee for ever and ever.” All his life he strove to give all of us, through his teachings and his example, that vision of the eleventh chapter of the Bhagavad Gita and that great opening proclamation of the Isopanishad. That is our special inheritance from Gurudev’s life, teachings and sharing.

This then is what we should receive and keep in our hearts. On the basis of this truth we must try to live. Then, though living in the world, we shall not be of the world; though living amidst the many, amidst *prapancha*, yet *prapancha* will not enter our heart to take possession and dominate us. God will guide our life; God will dominate our life.

That is the great truth. That is the great fact. If you want to go through *samsara* without being touched and caught by *samsara* or without being overcome by the fascination of the passing names and forms of this *maya-bazaar*, then the only way is to become established in this vision: What I perceive, what I see, is Brahman and that is my goal. What I perceive, what I see, hear, taste, touch and smell is that very goal which I’m trying to attain through my *sadhana*, my *yoga-abhyasa*, my *japa*, meditation and philosophy. I am daily perceiving that which I am striving for. I live in it. I move in it. I have my being in it. It is everywhere around me. Let it ever abide in my heart. Let it ever shine in my heart. The very goal which I am striving to attain is all around me. That very Being is all around me. He is now, here, within, without, in all things.

That is the one way of attaining Him even before you have realised Him, of having Him before you have actually realised. “*Yo mam pasyati sarvatra sarvam cha mayi pasyati tasya’ham na pranasyami sa cha me na pranasyati* (He who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, never becomes separated from Me, nor do I become separated from him).”

This is the great truth. Even while you are on the *marga* (path) if you wish to possess Him, this is the way He has unambiguously revealed—with no vagueness, with absolute certitude, very plainly and clearly. Bless yourself by meditating upon it, reflecting upon it and by living it—making it the basis of all your *vyavahara*. Then you will be the most blessed person on earth!

75. NON-DUALITY AND YOU

Worshipful homage unto the supreme, eternal Reality, the one, absolute, transcendental, cosmic Spirit Divine! By virtue of the fact that It is transcendental, absolute, one and non-dual, It is present everywhere, encompassing all by Its infinity. Therefore, all existence is Its own manifestation, as it were, is Its own expression. For there can be no other.

That Reality, therefore, is your reality. That infinite Cosmic Life, therefore, throbs within you as your own life. Your feeling of your awareness of your existence as “I am” derives from that I AM.

Thus, it is the One that knits the seeming many into a homogeneous living unity. There are not many though there seems to be many. Within all the seeming many, one Being alone proclaims: “I AM. I alone am.” Therefore, all who are gathered here at this moment are not many. Seeming to be many, we are only one in that Being.

Regarded individually, waves may be many, but regarded in the context of the ocean, they are one. They appear upon the one; they subsist upon the one; they subside into the one. Even during this seeming threefold process, the ocean and the ocean alone exists. Even when the waves seem to exist, it is the ocean alone that exists in the seeming multifariousness. That is the fact of God and man. That is the fact of the Universal Soul and the individual soul. That is the fact about the Presence in which we are and ourselves. There is only One. Harmony prevails. Deep peace alone pervades. Supreme joy alone prevails and pervades everywhere, always, at all times, in all seemingly changeful circumstances. The change is a passing appearance. The unchanging is the reality and that reality is Divinity. It is ever-present Divinity, peace profound and bliss perennial.

A thin veil separates you, as it were, from the ever-prevailing Presence, peace and bliss. And, that a thin veil prevents you from perceiving is only a manner of expression. There is no veil because there is only non-duality. It is only a method of trying to explain that which is absolutely inexplicable.

The Reality is immediate. It is never absent, and It is the only thing that is because It is non-dual. And, the Reality is everyone’s property. It belongs to you; you belong to It. This is the central experience of our ancient, common ancestors of the Upanishadic era, and we are the fortunate and blessed heirs of this experience which they have left us as our heritage. Over the heritage, the heir has a natural right.

Therefore, it is said: “Ask and it shall be given, for it is yours by birthright.” The tragedy of this earth life is that no one asks. They ask for what they can see—passing unrealities. No one realises the worth and value of that which cannot be seen. For when an object is too close, it cannot be seen.

There is no lack of That which you are seeking. But there is a lack in the seeking. There is a confusion as to the direction. You cannot go and find an object by searching for it when it is already in you as you.

May each and every one of you make this truth and fact an actual experience within your own consciousness— not in some remote future, but in the immediate present. And may it be your endeavour ever to dwell in that consciousness, ever to live that Reality in all your being and your doing.

May your existence, your entire being, be the experience and the expression of this *sat, chit, ananda* and *santi*!

76. IT IS WHAT YOU ARE AND DO THAT COUNTS

Loving adorations to revered and beloved Holy Master Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji who has done everything that he can—and in some ways who has done what no other man has done—to throw light on the path to blessedness. He showed and placed before us a way of life and all that needs to be done to pursue this path in every minute detail, so that living the life and following the path we may attain blessedness in and through this very body. May his loving benedictions enable each and every one of us here to be practical in our spiritual life, to emphasise more upon being and doing than on knowing.

It is what you are that counts in the eyes of God. It is what you do that bears fruit, not what you know. You are all familiar with the story of Devarishi Narada who did not have peace of mind even though he knew everything that is to be known. He takes his problem to Sanatkumara: “I have learned everything that is to be learned. I have vast knowledge, but, nevertheless, I am suffering, I have no rest, I have no inner peace.”

“What have you learned? What all have you studied? What knowledge have you acquired?” asks Sanatkumara.

Narada’s reply is a narration of all the sacred books that were perhaps then existing. Then Narada is told: “Your studies are admirable, your knowledge is praiseworthy, but the Supreme is attained by *living* the life indicated by the scriptures.” The Atman cannot be learned through discourses, nor by listening to a great deal of expositions: *nayam atma pravachanena labhyah, na medhaya, na bahuna srutena* (This Atman cannot be attained by study of the Veda, nor by intelligence, nor by much learning).

Therefore, if we really want highest blessedness, if we really want that supreme, indescribable experience Absolute that at once grants you indescribable peace, joy and bliss, then may we live the life as the great ones have lived and taught us. Walk in the footsteps of the great ones, *maha-jana yena gatah sa panthah* (the path trodden by the great ones). Live even as they have lived, and you will attain the same state of blessedness and divine perfection, illumination and liberation. Thus we have been told.

Sometimes the thought comes: What is the use of much discourse and much talk. Sage Dakshinamurti taught in silence. The great master Jesus did not address large audiences. All His recorded words will fit into a booklet. Lord Buddha lived longer and many words were written about his life and movements, but His actual teachings will only fill a small volume.

But then, their teachings were stored in human hearts and they have been revived afresh, filled with new power as time goes on. For their teachings were practised. New life has been continuously put into their teachings, infused into them, by those who knew that it is what we are and what we do that yields results. And, it is those who did take the step of making themselves personifications of these great teachings, practising them in all their fullness in their own active, day-to-day life, who have made their words a living reality for us even today.

Reflect well! The Upanishads are very slim volumes—some with eighteen verses, some with twenty-four verses. But they comprise the quintessence of the ancient, ageless wisdom that has been the heritage of all those born in this country.

When we consider these realities, one begins to rightly feel that to say much is superfluous, and to do even a little is the essence of the spiritual life. Being and doing, therefore, count in the spiritual life over and above all things, all knowings. Erudition is admirable. A great deal of learning and knowledge is not bad. But certainly one must see that it is not enough.

May this perception, this understanding, drive us onward to greater action, to practical spiritual life, to the active living of the teachings of the great masters. This is the one thing needful. May the grace of the Divine enable us to attain supreme blessedness through a practical spiritual life—through divine life in daily practice!

77. KNOWLEDGE, MEDITATION AND SPIRITUALISING YOUR LIFE

The supreme goal of life has been declared to be *brahma-jnana*, the ultimate spiritual knowledge that brings about enlightenment and illumination and liberates the individual soul from the necessity of once again coming into this plane of pain and death—putting an end to this unending wheel of transmigration.

Wisdom alone, Self-realisation, Self-knowledge, *brahma-jnana*, alone can liberate one, not ritualistic worship, outer ceremonials, not sacraments, not pilgrimage, nor vows, disciplines, charity or merits. These are good, but even if you engage in such meritorious, pious religious activity for a hundred births, nay a hundred thousand births, unless you have illumination or gnosis or *jnana* there is no liberation.

These good actions are to be engaged in so that you may avoid getting caught in the trap of bad actions. That is their value. They keep us going in the right and proper direction and thus become a means of preventing regression. But unless Self-realisation can take place, unless one is illumined with enlightenment—that knowledge which transcends all other knowledge, attaining which one does not come back into this world of pain and death, knowing which everything else is known—then one has not found the only and safe raft that can take one across the ocean of *samsara*.

Therefore, *jnana* has this supreme value. Vedanta means *jnana*. *Jnana* is the great purifier. Attaining *jnana* all seeds of past *karmas* are burnt to ashes. One becomes liberated then and there. And ultimately deep meditation is the one and only *sadhana* that can bring about illumination. In whatever way one describes illumination, meditation is the ultimate portal, gateway, to blessedness.

All *yogas* culminate in meditation, whether it is *japa yoga*, *kirtan yoga*, *kundalini yoga*, *karma yoga*, *bhakti yoga*, *dhyana yoga* or *jnana yoga*. Ultimately, all the *angas* (limbs) of these various *yogas* culminate in meditation, and in and through deep meditation alone illumination is attained. The word meditation as such may not be used, but it is deep meditation that is mentioned in

the description of all *yogas*. In the nine modes of devotion, meditation does not seem to be mentioned, but *atma-nivedanam* (total self-surrender) means nothing but that—becoming a zero, totally losing oneself through concentrated devotion into a state of meditation. It means meditation.

Knowledge and meditation are, therefore, indispensable requirements for supreme attainment in the spiritual life. But then, as long as we are conscious of our body and we are in a state of identification with the body, the relative reality is a reality. Thus when we are living in this world of men, engaged in activity, having diverse human relationships—acting, interacting and reacting—we cannot help behaving in a manner as situations require. So, there is every risk of forgetting our main mission in life, what we are in reality and slipping into a state of unwisdom, of *aviveka* and *avichara*, and getting trapped in that state of unwisdom.

We cannot be in a state of meditation for twenty-four hours a day. We cannot keep up that awareness, that *jnana*, twenty-four hours a day, for forcibly the outer world and things in it will draw us out of our inner equipoise and get us involved in this outer phenomenal world. Even the *avatars* have to silently bow to their own law.

Knowing that it is not possible for us to be in a constant state of *jnana* or *dhyana* twenty-four hours a day and that we are faced with the situation of being forcefully made to engage in activity by *prakriti*, what do the scriptures have to say? Divinise your life! Spiritualise all your activities and live, move and have your being in this world in a state of God-consciousness. Identify yourself with your *divya-atma-svarupa* and live in the awareness that God resides in this body-temple of mine. And let all your actions bear witness to the supreme perfection of the indwelling God.

Divinity is the one key word. What is man's concept of God? He is an ocean of compassion. Therefore, the one practice that ultimately makes *jnana* and *dhyana* fruitful is the divinising of one's life—to be compassionate, merciful, forgiving, kind, to have consideration for others, to be good and to do good. Act not from your human level but act from your divine level, for your human personality is only temporary.

Your reality is Divinity. Let this be awakened. Make yourself a centre of all that is godly, all that is beautiful, sublime and divine. Have feeling for others. Identify with the joy and sorrow of others. In the presence of sorrow, immediately act to be an angel of mercy. Be an instrument of mercy, peace and joy. In and through your life, constantly be a channel for the expression of God's perfection, of God's love, compassion, kindness and consideration.

This is the one thing needful. This alone makes *jnana* and *dhyana* fruitful and capable of bestowing upon you liberation. Hinting at this in the latter half of the twelfth chapter of the Gita, Lord Krishna tells us who is dear to Him. You may read all the philosophical books and you may be able to sit for hours in *dhyana*, but if your heart is not filled with love, kindness and compassion for others, you may obtain everything, but to obtain illumination and liberation will not be possible.

Therefore, as we emerge into this new day, let us earnestly contemplate this great fact. It is not through wisdom and concentration alone that one becomes illumined and liberated, but through loving kindness, wishing good for all and engaging in action that is conducive to the good of all.

In this fertile field of spiritualised living, *jnana* and *dhyana* will bear the fruit of illumination and liberation. Not otherwise. May we all realise this truth and humbly strive to make ourselves centres of godliness and compassion, kindness and goodness. This is the one thing needful.

C. LIBERATION AND THE MIND

It is a strange metaphysical paradox that the mind and intellect which is our greatest problem, our greatest barrier and bondage, is the one and only instrument we have to approach the great Reality. It is a paradox that we have to recognise. It is a paradox that cannot be solved; it has to be transcended. You have to go beyond the mind and intellect by using it in the constant exercise of three *sadhanas*: Enquiry into who am I and what should be my life if it is to be real and authentic; discrimination based upon this enquiry; and genuine dispassion which is the outcome of earnest and continuous enquiry and discrimination. These three *sadhanas* are the soul of the spiritual life; they are an indispensable support of all other *sadhanas*.

All people want to concentrate, but all people have the same complaint: Mind runs hither and thither; it does not fix itself upon the object of meditation. This is precisely because seekers are only aware of one aspect of concentration; they are not aware of the second, broader aspect.

The first aspect of concentration is the technique—when you sit upon an *asana*, try to be steady and concentrate your mind. The body should be motionless, but in the most relaxed way possible. There should be nothing in your posture to drag your attention from the mind dimension to the body dimension.

The second aspect of concentration pertains to the remaining part of the twenty-four hours. During the rest of the day, towards what is your mind focussed? Is it in its usual uncontrollable state, or are you trying to give it a definite direction? By the way you live, are you trying to reduce to the barest, irreducible minimum the different directions the mind has to take?

Concentration has to be understood in its integrate, holistic state. Your entire external life from morning till night should be an ongoing continuous state of being concentrated upon the Supreme Being. Your heart, mind, intellect, feelings and actions must be habitually focussed upon the Divine. Mind has to be educated, trained, disciplined, to keep itself constantly stayed upon the Eternal.

Are you working in a planned manner to do this? If not, how can your technique of concentration be successful? Thus, pay attention to both aspects of concentration. Then see the effect!

78. BE AWARE OF YOUR INTERIM DIMENSION

In this world, each human individual has three dimensions of life. Most people, especially *sadhakas*, are immediately aware of two of them and are trying to study and deal with these two. But the third one, everyone is aware of it, but no one pays any attention to it. No one fully recognises the importance of it.

Everyone is aware and pays attention to the first dimension, the secular life, the outer life, the worldly life, where we have to interact with people. This outer, secular world comes upon us from all sides from the moment we wake up from sleep. We cannot do anything about it, and it does not care for our inner aspirations. People and events push us to do things and we must act.

Secondly, we have a spiritual life where we are connected with God, where we are Atman, Immortal Souls, unborn. In that dimension, that other aspect, we are That which weapons cannot injure, fire cannot burn, water cannot wet, wind cannot dry; we are eternal, ever pure, perfect, *avinasi* (indestructible).

But it is the third dimension of life—everyone knows it, but no one pays attention to it—that is more important than either the outer secular life or the inner spiritual life. For it is this third aspect which decides how you will deal with the outer life and what you will do with the spiritual life.

This third dimension is your inner life of thoughts, feelings, views, attitudes, reactions, your psychological life of memories—hundreds of thousands of memories— imaginations, fantasies, desires, schemes, ambitions, projections into the future, thinking about tomorrow, about ten years hence. It is your psychological life of attitudes— positive, negative, warped, justified, unjustified, wise, unwise—an inner life of reactions to what keeps happening around you.

We are aware of this third dimension, but we are too busy engaged in and involved in our outer life; we are too busy with our *sadhana*, our spiritual life—*japa*, meditation, *svadhyaya*, *upasana*, *kirtan*—to pay much attention to it. Whereas, your ancients, those men of wisdom, gave it great importance.

They paid so much attention to it that they went so far as to say that it is this in-between, interim dimension, this subtle, invisible but very tangibly felt level, which decides what the world will be for you and what the inner spiritual life will be for you. Everything depends upon it. Because, as a matter of fact, all day, from morning till evening, you live only in this interim dimension, this psychological level of your life. It itself is the reason, the cause of your bondage or liberation. *Mana eva manushyanam karanam bandha-mokshayoh* (Mind alone is the cause of bondage and liberation of human beings). A person is what one thinks. As you think so you become. What a person's faith is, that that person is. In so many ways they say that it is this interim inner life—which is not the higher spiritual life nor the outer material life—which is the very stuff of your life. You live there only.

You live in this interim life when you are relating yourself to this outer *vyavaharic* world; you live in this interim dimension when you are dreaming. And it is in this interim life that everything about spirituality, about *sadhana*, is to be known by you, grasped by you and understood

and applied by you. It is only upon the dictates of your intelligence, your rationality and understanding, that your higher spiritual life is based.

And if your higher spiritual processes such as *japa* and meditation are not properly supported by a correctly lived interim inner life, everything is in vain. You will be doing *sadhana* for years and years, yet you may still be firmly enmeshed in your bondage. You will not proceed one step forward because something here binds you down, pulls you down.

Therefore, when all the great realised sages and seers formulated their methods, they paid maximum attention to your *sankalpa-vikalpa* (imagination), to your *vrittis*. They deeply studied the different states that the mind assumes. And they formulated ways and means of living this interim life in an intelligent way, with common sense, with caution and with understanding. For it is this which decides whether any factor, state of affairs or situation in your outer life, in your gross, material secular life, will be favourable to you or unfavourable to you.

If one is faced with sure death, one is filled with fear. But if one makes up one's mind, it will be taken as a challenge and thus arouses within one all the courage and heroism one has in one's inner content. Markandeya took sure death staring him in the face not as a catastrophe or calamity; he did not break down into fear. Rather, he said: "No, I shall deal with this; I shall overcome." Savitri was facing the loss of her husband, sure widowhood. Normally, women will start beating their breast, weep and wail, but Savitri, no! She said: "I shall dare even to defy death." And it is not the spiritual dimension of Savitri that reacted, it was the psychological dimension that took this as a challenge, a situation to be faced, grasped, confronted, dealt with and overcome.

These are indications of what you can do if you make this interim dimension of your life an instrument of right perception, of facing everything and moving towards it in a positive, creative manner and not in a defeatist, pessimistic or negative manner. Move towards life. Make use of every faculty within you. Deal with things that are outside in a positive manner.

Everything in this world—every person, every situation, every experience—has both a positive and a negative side. The wise spiritual aspirant makes use of his interim dimension to always put forth a positive attitude, a positive vision, a positive approach and orientation: "Let me see in what way I can deal with it to my advantage. If God is my father, mother, friend, relative and He is the doer of all good, and wishes my highest good, then if He has brought about these circumstances, He has some purpose in it. Otherwise, He will not do it. So, let me see in what way I can be benefited, in what way I shall deal with it, or in spite of this, in what way I can keep moving onward, Godward."

It is this interim dimension that should be fully at work, intelligently thinking, reasoning, enquiring, discriminating and deciding step by step in what way this outer material world of *vyavahara* should be dealt with, in what way you have to live and move in it. It is this interior dimension that decides what each and everything that happens to you is going to be for you. For, essentially, until we reach Self-realisation, every human individual is a psychological being. Therefore, to make it the right instrument is the most essential part of the total training of the individual for attaining enlightenment, illumination and emancipation.

Thus, it is worth paying attention to what you are doing, day after day, in this interim psychological realm of your being—what thoughts you are allowing to remain, what thoughts you are rejecting, how you are behaving: “This is good for me; this is going to be a problem. I do not want a problem to be created within me by my own psychological being. I want solutions from it, not problems. Therefore, I will pay full attention to it and see how my mind-process works, how it functions, in what patterns it thinks its thoughts. I will be always alert to see that everything that is coming up and manifesting itself within is positive, helpful and creative, and not negative, destructive and a liability to me.”

Make your mind, its functions, its activities—every manifestation of it, whether in the form of a feeling or a thought or an intention—an asset and not a liability. Otherwise, there will be constantly a war within yourself, constantly a two-way pull, and a great deal of your power will be consumed in dealing with the situation which you have allowed to prevail inside.

All the powers of your entire being should be free, should be one hundred per cent available for living both the higher life and the outer life in a wise, creative and positive way. Otherwise, ninety per cent will be used up in a constant inner resolution of situations and conflicts because of your not having the wisdom to be alert and awake to channel the mind in such a way that the interim dimension is always positive, gainful and helping you to achieve—not pulling you down, enmeshing you and creating problems for you.

Therefore, inside there should be an alert, keen, interested observation of what is going on, and a constant, continuous effort to see that the inner state is always a thing that is taking you forward and not holding you up or, worse still, taking you backwards. This is the art and science of day-to-day life of the *sadhaka* or the seeker, of the devotee of God or the spiritual aspirant. And this is much more necessary in the spiritual person than even for a business executive or a professional person.

Today is, therefore, an indication to you of this important inner life, the interim dimension or level of your being which is the link between the higher spiritual inner life and the gross, outer, worldly secular life. This is both secular as well as spiritual. It partakes of both. It affects both. And success in both the first two dimensions depend upon what is going on here.

You can do *sadhana* for years and years, but if it only increases your pride, your *abhimana* (ego), then finished, all your *sadhana* is as nothing. It will fall to the ground. It is like a house built on sand, because the entire purpose of spiritual life is to try to get rid of this big thing that is plaguing you, that is sitting upon you, the human ego-sense, the individual personality. And if this is not grasped by your mind, intellect and understanding, and if your *japa*, meditation, vows, austerities either inflate your ego or have no provision for trying to directly lessen it and eliminate it, then no matter how much you are doing you are stuck; you are stuck!

Therefore, in a hundred different ways, Holy Master Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji tried to make you aware of this much known but least attended to inner life of yours— not the higher spiritual inner life, but the interim, psychological, mental life of yours. He wrote so many volumes including *Mind Its Mysteries and Control* to try to bring your attention to it. He gave so many

secrets of the inner realm and gave so many valuable hints. “Give up Brahmin *abhimana*, give up *sannyasa abhimana*, give up doctor *abhimana*, give up name, fame and sex *abhimana*.”

It would, therefore, pay rich dividends to be constantly taking a look at yourself. Ultimately, this outer world, what surrounds you, is not what it is for others. It is your own world. Each one creates one’s own world by the way in which one looks at it, understands it, reacts to it, approaches it, and the attitude one takes to it. If there are a thousand people in this hall, they are living in a thousand different worlds. Each one makes one’s own world.

Realise this. It is the mind. You make your own outer world. And in the way in which you make it, it looks back at you. It is like a person standing before a mirror and looking at his own countenance. Whether it is serene, or peaceful, or tense, or negative all depends upon the expression you assume. If you smile, it smiles. If you scowl, it scowls. If you frown, it frowns.

And this interim dimension is a secret realm which no one else in the world really knows. Someone else may try to infer by some outer signs, but, really, no one else can enter into it and know. Even Yajnavalkya didn’t know what was in the mind of Maitreyi. He thought she would just want to have a secure life after he left. Rama did not know what was going on in Sita’s mind. He thought she would be content to serve His mother when He had gone to the forest. He did not know what stuff was inside Sita.

Therefore, pay attention, pay attention to this interim, hidden, inner life which only you know. Because upon it depends your success or failure, your bondage or liberation. Whatever the outer world is depends upon what you make of it from this inner realm. And your higher spiritual inner life also depends upon in what way you are able to understand it, know its essence, and, with wisdom, live it.

May the supreme power of God, the Cosmic Power, the Supreme Being who dwells within you, and has manifested in you as this interim inner life, enable you to understand it, utilise it, and make it a positive asset, an instrument for liberation and Divine illumination and perfection. That is my humble prayer.

You are eternal, beyond time. You are timeless. Nevertheless, even though you are rooted in that state of timelessness, you now find yourself to be a creature of time. Is there any way that we can profit from this peculiar, paradoxical situation we are caught in? While we are in time, can we turn it to our advantage and utilise it in a gainful way?

Our wise ancients admonished us: “Forget about the past. It does not exist. It is finished. Don’t be burdened by it. But before you forget it, take from it all the lessons and wisdom it has taught you about yourself and the world. Then fully concentrate on the present. Focus upon all the opportunities it offers you each day. Take the present in both your hands in a creative, dynamic, constructive way. Be always positive.”

And, while you thus take wisdom from the past and focus upon the opportunities of the present, visualise what you wish to be in the future: “I wish to be a liberated soul. I wish to be an

instrument of God and a benefactor of man. I wish to bring glory and honour to my *guru*, to become an embodiment of his teachings and the teachings of the scriptures and all the great saints.”

In this way, utilise time to go beyond time. Attain your true status as the time-transcending, eternal, all-perfect Being. Do it now and become blessed!

79. WITH WHAT YOU HAVE, MAKE THE HIGHEST AND BEST USE

There is an expression in the West: “Make do.” It means that whatever we have, good or bad, we must make the best use of that. You must make do with what you have and not lament over what you do not have or fantastically imagine that one day you will have—and then you will be tops. Instead, you look at the hard facts, the ground reality, and make the best of what you have. You don’t go on waiting for some fanciful future when everything is perfect. This is one of the defects of the mind—always looking for a time when everything will be ideal.

There is also a significant saying: “That to one who has, God will give even more—to overflowing.” Its significance is that if you will thus make do with what God has given you, then automatically the Supreme Plenum, the *purnam*, starts giving you more and more, because having done the best that you can with what you already have, you have created conditions for being given more and for receiving more. Some mysterious cosmic law seems to start working and providing you with more and more, because you have deserved it by putting what you have to the very best and highest use.

You have not been neglectful. You have not treated with scant respect what you have already been endowed with. You have given it due recognition, due respect, due value and started making use of it in the best possible manner, which means that you have recognised the worth of what the Cosmic Being has already given you. This is no small thing!

Therefore, taking whatever we have, good or bad, in a holistic way, taking everything together, we apprise our NOW situation, our NOW endowments, abilities, capacities and faculties and say: “Yes, this is what I am at this point in time. In God’s own eternity, this is what I am. This is what I am and what I have, so let me put it to the highest and best use with all possible sincerity, keen interest, earnestness, dedication and enthusiasm.” If this is done, what can you not achieve? There is nothing that you cannot achieve.

Right at the very beginning you will start progressing, moving forward. You will not look forward to something, but start moving forward. This is the great thing needful. This is the working of grace. In the context of Indian philosophy it is called *purushartha*.

So, in the light of this truth, how do we look at what we have? It is not to be disdained, turned away from, but looked at in totality. “Yes, this is what I have. God has endowed me with this thing called life with all its plus and minus. Yet, I have it. So let me sit up and see in what way I can make the very best use of myself and in what way I can make the very best use of life.”

This means that you start looking at things in a totally different way: “Everything that I am and everything that life holds for me has some value in this approach I have now decided to take. So, let me no longer analyse and divide life into things that are helpful and not helpful, that are *sadhana* and not *sadhana*, that are spiritual and contrary to spiritual. No, I will take one hundred per cent of my life and see in what way I can turn each per cent to my advantage, how I can look at it in a different way and see in all of it a means of attaining the Goal, a means of Self-unfoldment, illumination and enlightenment. I will not classify or categorise things, nor try to fight against, reject or throw something away. I will take life as a whole and see everything in it as a possible plus factor kept there by God in His all-intelligence to help me.

“Yes, even when I commit some blunder and have to pay for it, I will make use of it: ‘Now I know what I should not have done and what it is I should do if such a situation arises tomorrow.’” So, the blunder has given you a valuable insight into life and equipped you with new knowledge. Therefore, even when you think something is to be very much regretted, a most unfortunate happening, it has great value for the future. It has alerted you to something that perhaps until that time you had not been aware of. So it has a plus value, it has a positive purpose, and, therefore, it is a factor helping your spiritual life and not the contrary.

In this way, everything, both the sum totality of what you are and the sum totality of what you feel have to be looked at in this way. Our entire dealing with both these factors, and when I say our entire dealing with both, I exactly say what I mean—that you are something more than life. You are something apart from this me which is all that you have.

So, when you know that you are something apart from this me, you don’t get caught up in the me and say *I*. You know that this is also an endowment, and you begin to think in what way I can make use of this me and this life of mine. Both of them are factors that you, the real you, the eternal you, the essential you, can make use of.

And here we come ultimately to the great saying: “You are what your mind is.” So, if you take this mental attitude, this new vision, this new way of looking at and approaching things, you say no to nothing and all things stand before you with a new meaning. Everything is a plus factor and you have to deal with them in a way in which they become endowments and assets, not liabilities and problems. You make use of them.

Herein comes the necessity of your thinking being backed up by the wisdom of your reasoning, your *buddhi*. By a little reflection, by a little discrimination you can go on making minus into plus and not even think of it as minus. “This is a plus point. At the moment I don’t see the plus point, but let me see where I can identify the plus point in this seemingly minus situation, both within me and in the life in which I am.”

Thus should be the wise, discriminating seeker and *sadhaka*’s approach to life and the living of life. May God’s grace and the blessings and benedictions of Gurudev give you the key to this—give you the key, guide your footsteps and enlighten your mind at every step.

80. CONVERT YOUR MIND INTO A LIBERATOR

Loving adorations to worshipful and beloved Holy Master Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji, whose benign glance of grace is ever upon you and with whom you seem to have had some inexplicable and unfathomable *karmic* relationship brought over from your previous incarnation. Without *karmic* relationship it is impossible for individual souls upon this earth plane to be drawn into any type of relationship. And, the highest kind of relationship—the greatest, most auspicious and blessed relationship—is between a devotee and God, a seeker and a saint, because this is the one and only relationship that liberates.

All other relationships are prolific sources of bondage to sorrow, to restlessness, to *asanti*. All experiences arising out of contact and relationship with passing, ephemeral, perishable, temporary things are said to be the source of sorrow. *Ye hi samsparsaja bhogah dukkha yonaya eva te* (The enjoyments that are born of contacts are only wombs of pain).

When one realises this ground truth—that association with all temporary things are fraught with sorrow—then only our journey to the Eternal begins. Sorrow, therefore, seems to have a purpose. Pain was declared by Gurudev to be an eye-opener. It can lead to the discovery and the rectification of error as well as the cause of sorrow.

Sorrow is caused by relationship with temporary things, and it is mind that creates relationships by its thought moving towards relative things. Through thought alone is brought about all human bondage, all human sorrow. And strange is the paradox, it is through thought alone that one can liberate oneself from the bondage created by thought. The one and only way of overcoming the state created by thoughts moving in a certain direction is to undertake the heroic task of purposefully making the mind to go in the one direction in which the mind becomes the liberator. Sorrow then begins to recede until it gradually fades away and vanishes, giving place to peace and to ultimate liberation.

The secret of sorrowlessness is to undertake this purposeful direction of thought—not towards the relative, but towards the Absolute, not towards the non-eternal, but towards the Eternal. That is the relationship that brings about liberation.

Recognising this, the wise seeking soul realises: “The way is through consciously directing my mind and my thoughts towards the Divine, towards the source of my being, towards the indwelling presence of the Supreme Reality in the very centre of my being, towards that Being who is everywhere—nearer than the nearest, more proximate to me than myself. Wherever the senses move, let me make the mind recognise the presence of the Divine there, even in that object.”

By thus transforming your interior, making the mind take up a new vision—not beholding the name and form and forgetting the indwelling presence of God; but, on the contrary, rejecting the name and form and directing your attention towards the indwelling Reality; by launching upon this purposeful new method of seeing, new method of the awareness of God here and now (in us and in all things) as the one and only reality that there is—man becomes taken up into a state of God-consciousness upon the psychological level, of God-awareness upon the mental level.

Here mind changes its entire role. Instead of taking you towards bondage, it now becomes the instrument to move you towards *moksha* and liberation. *Mana eva manushyanam karanam bandhamokshayoh* (Mind alone is the cause of bondage and liberation of human beings). “God is here and now.” If you think in this way, you dwell in God. “This is the world I am caught in.” If you think of the world in this way, you are caught in the world.

Verily, you have to decide whether you will make your mind a gift of God or whether you’ll make your mind a net in which you are caught and struggling. The wise decide to make use of the mind and liberate themselves from bondage, darkness and sorrow. Those who are not wise, who dwell in folly, allow themselves to be made use of by the mind, and this gift of God becomes a source of affliction, our greatest problem.

They refer to it as a gift from God because it is the highest endowment. The ability to think and feel and reason through the mind is what makes us what we are. Without it we would no longer be upon the human level; we would sink to the animal level of species. But, even a gift from God can become a burden if we allow it to possess and control us. It becomes truly a gift of God if we control it and make it take us along with it to the great liberation.

This is where we stand in relation to our minds and where our minds stand in relation to us. For it is through the mind and its thought that we create all relationships. Will we allow the mind to create relationships for us willy-nilly, or will we make use of the mind to purposefully create the one great supreme relationship by which the mortal becomes immortal, by which man becomes liberated here and now, even while in the body?

That is the decision we have to take, and blessed is the one who takes the right decision. God bless us all to take the right decision. For we are most blessed and fortunate that He has brought us into relationship with an enlightened, holy spiritual master who has thrown much light upon what relationship to take and how to create this relationship.

We are blessed. May we recognise this blessing, make use of it, go beyond sorrow, and become established in bliss, peace, fullness and freedom!

81. OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE INNER AND OUTER WORLD

Worshipful homage to the supreme, eternal Absolute Reality of whom we are all inseparable parts sharing in that Divinity and in that perfection. Whether we are aware of it or not that inner spiritual relationship is more real than any other relationship that exists in this creation.

If we are to be aware of that eternal relationship, we have to be very, very alert, vigilant and careful that the innumerable relationships we have with external things, beings, situations and experiences do not become diverting factors drawing us away from this inner awareness towards other things. If we do not exercise this caution consciously, if we do not make purposeful effort to keep this vigilance and alertness always, the nature of our present human identity is such that it is

bound to take us away from the Reality and disperse our entire being in trivialities, in things of no worth or value.

“*Aham adischa madhyam cha bhutanam anta eva cha* (I am the beginning, middle and also the end of all beings).” Thus declares the Supreme Being in trying to initiate us into this secret inner relationship. Despite this great grace, this great teaching that He is our all-in-all, everything to us, man still wanders in the jungle of forgetfulness of God, in the forest of God-alienation.

The reason is precisely because one does not make conscious and purposeful effort to keep up this awareness in the midst of distraction, one does not make conscious and purposeful effort through enquiry and through an ever-active discrimination exercised throughout the day to see that the externalising, diverting and distracting influence of the universe outside is counteracted wisely, diligently and constantly by a contrary inner recollection of ourselves in the Spirit.

It is only if this is done that one can keep up this awareness despite the outer attraction of the universe about us with its countless relationships to things, people, situations and experiences that draw us out. The wise *sadhaka* is that being who makes his or her device to see that this externalising, diverting and distracting force in this world of temporary, vanishing appearances is nullified, and, on the contrary, as Ramatirtha used to say: “Make even a stumbling block into a stepping stone to success.” One tries to turn to one’s own advantage even these distracting God-forgetting forces and influences by making them factors that help one to stay in God-awareness.

As the Bavarian mystic, Jakob Boehme, said: “Everything represents God. Everything is a symbol of the Eternal. It is there to remind you of the Reality.” He turned the whole situation from negative to positive by saying that whatever you can see, hear, touch, taste, smell or think about is there to drive your mind towards God, to evoke within you the thought of the Reality.

However, if such a transformation in your vision and your experience of the external universe is to be brought about, there is an important factor which we cannot afford to miss. When none of these external factors are there, when nothing is there to disturb you, draw you out, divert and disperse you—perhaps you are sitting alone in your room, relaxed, and the lights are off—why do you not immediately plunge into God-thought, God-awareness? When these factors that you always blame for your inability to keep up an unbroken current of God-thought are all, for the time being, null and void, why don’t you go into *samadhi*?

It is because we have another whole dimension of relationships. We are related to memories of the past. We are related to fantasies and imaginations of the future. It may not be the distant future; it may be what you have to do tomorrow. We are also related to emotional attitudes towards other things and beings. We are related to sentiments. This is a whole world of inner relationships that militate against our eternal relationship with God.

Thus, we live in two worlds, both false, both obstacles. So, we have to be alert and vigilant, exercising conscious awareness not only in relation to the outer external universe of things and beings, but we have to exercise equal caution, alertness and vigilance to see that this inner world of our own psyche—our own past, present and future—does not become a factor drawing us away

from God, distracting us, dispersing us and making us plunge into a subtle, inner subjective world of memories, imaginations, fears, desires, sentiments and emotions.

The Upanishads say that these streams of thought are always there in the mind. And, unless you are aware and watchful to perceive in what direction the thought stream is taking you, you are lost. You will be sitting for meditation, but you will be far away somewhere on the other side of the globe unless you exercise awareness and keep on diverting the stream in the direction of the Divine. One should consciously make effort to be stayed in the Divine, stayed upon the Reality.

It is not only politically that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. It is equally true of our inner psychological life and our personal external earth life in this material universe of names and forms. Eternal vigilance is a small price to pay if you contemplate the glory of liberty, the grandeur, the greatness and the beauty of liberty.

And, nothing comes without conscious, willing effort. Fortunate is the seeker to whom such an effort is meat and drink, who thrives upon such effort, for whom such a life is like music to a musician, poetry to a poet or art to an artist. If this spiritual vigilance is pursued for its own sake, it is something you thrive upon, it is your very life breath. It is not a drudge, it makes you gladdened, uplifted, elevated.

A wise saying that all the world knows, but which most people conveniently ignore is: “No gains without pains.” Yet, look at the hours a physical culturist will spend in the gymnasium to build up his body. Or, look at the years of training and self-denial an athlete will go through to prepare for the Olympics. Even if they win a gold medal, it is a few days of glory and then they are forgotten.

If, for the temporary, they are willing to make so much effort, how much more joyfully one should be able to willingly and happily make effort for the permanent, the eternal. With ceaseless effort, vigilance, and alertness we must skillfully divert the effect of these external and internal pulls to our advantage, making them favourable to *sadhana*, instead of contrary to *sadhana*.

This is skill in action. This is the right use of one’s intelligence, power of enquiry, discrimination and analysis. Therefore, with a burning earnestness from within, a deep sincerity in one’s longing, let us solve this seeming paradox of God being our all-in-all, being the nearest and deepest of all our relationships, being eternal and beginningless, and yet that relationship being so easily forgotten and apparently nullified by the temporary relationship to the world without and the world within.

This paradox cannot be put to an end by anyone or anything else other than by our own wisdom, earnestness, sincerity, wakefulness and clarity in clearly seeing the spiritual situation as it is. Seemingly formidable, but yet it is a trick that if one has the right formula and the key, it is not there. This obstacle is not there. Suddenly, it becomes to you your helper.

This is what Brother Lawrence did. This is what the mystics did. This is what all the great Upanishadic seers did and achieved and taught to us. They practised the presence of God keeping up a constant, unbroken stream of Reality-consciousness or God-awareness in the midst of

everything else. How to turn even seeming obstacles into factors that help us to keep up this constant, unbroken stream of God-remembrance we will, God willing, discuss in our next talk.

82. ABIDE BEYOND THE MIND

This body-house of yours if rightly understood, if you rightly relate yourself to it and recognise its true implication to you, is your field for spiritual evolution and liberation. It is not your bondage; it is not your problem; it is not your enemy. But you make it your bondage, your problem and your enemy.

This is unfortunate because time and again the great mystics and path-pointers tell us that after having gone through countless other states of subhuman life, the individual soul attains human status “by great good fortune.” When this is so, how can you say it is a great fall, a great bondage? It is irrational. It does not stand to reason that the peak point of the evolutionary process should be labelled as a problem and a bondage. It does not make any sense! It cannot be so. It is not so.

It is lack of enquiry and discrimination and succumbing to desires on the part of the *jiva* that makes an asset into a liability, a precious gift into a problem, the doorway to liberation into a so-called bondage. Sense-objects don’t come to us to harass us, to catch hold of us. We move towards them. It is your imagination and desire that propels you to undergo this foolish process of chasing sense-objects. It is a process of folly based upon unwisdom and *ajnana*.

Because, the truth is that what you are seeking, you are That, a hundredfold That, a thousandfold That. You are what the whole world is seeking. You are *ananda svarupa atma tattva*, where there is no pain, no sorrow. Peace and joy is your real nature, your own Self. This is the truth that has been proclaimed to us since ancient times in every generation. But we have turned away from it. So through God’s indescribable grace, our ancients have called: “Why unnecessarily continue in this self-created bondage? Arise, awake, attain illumination and be filled with bliss.”

Therefore let us be frank, impartial and truly admit squarely that our problem lies in our indifference to this call. For the plain truth is a fact that we must recognise and admit: We run after things. Therefore, while we blame the world—things, situations and persons—for all its distractions and attractions, as we pointed out last time, it is our lust and greed, our turbulent senses, our cravings and desires that really constitute the problem. And to prove it, we imagined that we were sitting in our room at night with the lights off. There are no longer any outer distractions, yet we do not go into *samadhi*. It is because, in truth, the dispersing factors are not outside; it is we who make them by our attitude, by our inner relationships of attachment and desire, by our “I and mine.”

Why does it happen? Because you are indifferent. You neglect to realise the reality of the Being within, your eternal companion that shines as your indweller, as your inner Self, and which is hidden from all your senses which are outgoing. Not one second is He absent from your life, but you choose to ignore that Presence within. You choose not to recognise It. If you but recognise It, your problem is solved.

When you are within you dwell with Him. You cannot help thinking about the indwelling Presence, for It is nearer to you than the nearest of things in this existence in which you live. It is the nearest of all. Therefore, the correction has to be made where the problem prevails. How can we do this? Silently Dakshinamurti and Sankaracharya show us. Silently, without words, they indicate it to us.

Know, recognise the fact that you and that Being are always connected, always related. There is an unbroken, eternal relationship between you and that Being. You are not apart. On the contrary, you are apart from everything else in this creation outside you, because they are separated from you by physical distance, by duality. Whereas, you and that Being are always connected, you are always one. Do not close your eyes to this truth, for it is the key to the problem. The problem is not without; it is within.

Refuse to move away from this union. Be centred always in that union. Do not leave that Being. Cling to Him with all your might, with all your being. Abide in that Reality, abide in the centre. Insist that you shall do it. If anything, even in the slightest way, tries to disturb you, say, “*Hato* (Get away), I abide in this centre!” Be centred in this oneness within. Be in your own innermost spiritual *guha* (cave), as it were, where no distraction can reach. Abide in the Self!

And what about the distractions created by the mind? What have you to do with them? “*Mano buddhy ahankara chittani na’ham* (I am not the mind, intellect, ego-sense or mind-stuff),” says Sankaracharya. And Gurudev has given us the *sutra*: “Nothing exists. Nothing belongs to me. I am neither mind nor body. Immortal Self am I.” The first line of this *sutra* cancels the whole world. Nothing exists. And even if you think that something exists, the second line makes it clear that nothing belongs to me. For, all belonging is created by the thought of the mind, by imaginations, by the attachments and the feeling of mineness of the mind. And none of these can bother me because I’m neither mind nor body.

And if they bother you, why should you worry? Countless thoughts, attachments, desires and longings are there in the minds of everyone around you. Are you bothered by them? Do you concern yourself about them? Are you in any way distressed about them? Why don’t you think of this important truth? Chaos may prevail in people’s minds around you, but you are not bothered because they don’t touch you, they don’t affect you or in any way create a problem for you.

Why only this mind? Why should it create a problem? Deal with it the same way as you do with the chaos that prevails in any other mind. Why should you think this is a problem? Say: “It’s going on. Somewhere, something is going on. Why should I bother about it? I am where I am, closely united with *ananda*, closely united with *santi*, closely united with That which is dwelling in the hearts of all.”

You’ll be in that state which you really are. Don’t unnecessarily make a big thing about this one mind only. Why this attachment? Why this identification with this mind? Millions of minds are milling around you, but you don’t identify yourself with any of them. They don’t hold a problem for you. Why only this mind?

This is the root cause of your problem. It is needlessly, unnecessarily identifying yourself with some phenomena that is going on. Treat these vagaries in the same category as all the others that are going on all around you. “It may be going on; it has nothing to do with me. Such things are going on in a million different little centres; I shall be in my eternal centre. Why should I move and go into this other false, non-existing centre?”

It is, therefore, making your centre your *upadhis*, your *anatman*, instead of making your centre your reality, your own Atman, that is the central problem, the beginning point of this *paristhiti* (situation). Therefore, realise it, reject it and abide in the Self. Transcend time and space and name and form and be ever in a state of God-awareness—that really and truly prevails permanently in the innermost centre of your wondrous being, the innermost centre where you are untouched, total Divinity.

This is the task to be done. All outer, external forms of spiritual discipline, processes and *sadhana* are intended only to achieve this inner state which already prevails there. It is a restoration of the state from which you have turned away. Once that state is restored, heaven prevails within you.

83. LIVING CONCENTRATION

To be ever centred, to ever abide, to ever be rooted, to always be fully aware that you live, move and have your being in God, in the one, non-dual Reality, is verily the practice of truth; for this is the great *fact* of your being. God being omnipresent, being the immanent reality hidden within all visible names and forms, we do indeed live, move and have our being in Him each and every moment and always through eternity.

If one forgets this truth, one is seemingly alienated from the very roots of one’s being—an alienation which, in fact, is impossible, but, for all practical purposes, it seems to be the condition of the individual soul. It weeps and wails in the midst of bliss absolute. It gropes, stumbles and falls in darkness, while in truth it dwells in eternal light. It seems to be a creature of birth and death when, in truth, it is part of eternal existence.

It is, therefore, this seeming alienation which is the cause and the prolific source of all seeming suffering and misery. But whatever state that exists in this mundane world need not become your experience unless you identify yourself with it; you may go through a chaotic world in serenity and peace. The moment you identify yourself with this chaos, with this restlessness, you will plunge into it.

This is inevitable when you do not centre yourself in the supreme peace that passeth understanding, in the *parama santi*. If you are rooted in It, centred in It, feel your oneness with It, peace and peace alone will be your experience. And you will look upon everything else serenely, as an unaffected, unattached witnessing consciousness, witnessing being.

All troubles, all sorrows start when you move away from this state of being concentrated upon or centred in God and become identified with states and conditions extraneous to you, not part of your being in any sense whatsoever. Adi Sankaracharya very clearly tells you that your body, *prana*, senses and mind constitute the limiting adjuncts to your reality; they do not constitute you. They are non-being, *anatman*. Thou art Atman. And everything else except Atman—which is your essential, eternal, unchanging, imperishable nature—in this temporary, ever-changing, ephemeral, transient human personality of yours is *anatman*, is non-Self; it is not you.

It is the natural behaviour of the mind and senses to be outgoing towards the non-eternal. But where can they move beyond God? He is everywhere present in all His fullness. No matter what thing or being they move towards, where can they move other than towards God? For, where is He not, and in what does He not dwell as the very essence of that being or thing?

So, whatever the eye beholds, be aware, be fully convinced that you are beholding the Divine Reality. Whatever the ear hears, be fully aware, be fully convinced that it is experiencing only Divinity. Whatever you feel with the sense of touch, be assured, be aware that you are experiencing God, for God is all that exists: *purusha evedam sarvam, yad bhutam yachcha bhavyam*—Whatever has been, whatever is, whatever shall be, all that is the great Divine Reality.

In whatever is smelt, tasted, thought of, remembered or imagined find your God. For, wherever your senses take you, they take you towards God—who alone was, who alone is, and who alone will be unto eternity. This is not only the ultimate experience and the fact, this should also be your present *abhyasa*, your present prayer, your present *sadhana*, your present way of existing and living your life. *Yat cha kimchit jagat sarvam drishyate srutyate 'pi va*—Whatever is before your gaze, whatsoever reaches your ears as sound, whatsoever exists in this world both within and without, all is indeed the one great Reality.

If you thus orient your entire being, then the outgoing senses cannot take you away from God. The outgoing senses cannot distract you. They cannot make you swerve away from your steady onward movement in the direction of the Goal Supreme.

If you are convinced of this and you begin to diligently practise this Upanishadic truth, if you keep up this *bhava*, then, indeed, at all times, in all conditions, in all circumstances, in the midst of all beings, in the midst of all activities, you will be in a state of *yoga*.

This is a holistic concept of living your life as a concentration, a total focussing, a directing of your entire being to the ever-present Reality or God. Life becomes the great *yoga* of concentration in a total sense until you reach illumination. It is a living concentration, a living *yoga*.

Like a river that ever flows on, that stops not until it reaches the ocean, may the stream of your life move in but one direction. No matter how much it may twist and turn, let it keep moving in one direction only, back into the ocean of *satchidananda*, which is your source and origin.

84. WITHDRAWAL OF THE MIND THROUGH PRAYER

That the mind is not inclined to go towards God, for it is ever drawn out and made to move towards objects—things, names and forms, experiences, contacts, sensations, persons, encounters—is a well known fact. That is the *svabhava*, the inherent nature, of the mind principle, the mind stuff.

It is precisely because of this reason—that the mind is inclined to objectivity, to externality towards this world outside us, to always think in terms of passing, perishable petty objects—that our ancients said that you must keep on trying to change the nature of the mind, withdraw it, take it away, turn it away from its wanton movement towards appearances, and propel it towards the Divine.

The very necessity of this exercise is due to this inherent nature of the mind to move towards externals. Unless and until we engage in an exercise to counter it, to gradually educate it and wear it away from its *svabhava*, it is not going to change its inherent nature *on any account*. This is clear.

If we have never been told that this is part of self-culture—part of the art and science of managing ourselves, part and parcel of the training which each individual human being must undertake and undergo in order to thus equip oneself with a mind that has been trained, disciplined, chastened, controlled and given a certain direction—how can we expect peace? Until and unless we have been told and we have engaged in this exercise, how can we expect happiness? How can we expect concentration, a calm mind, a serene interior when that which has to be done has not been done?

We all want peace, happiness, light, wisdom, illumination, liberation, serenity, calmness, but we do not consciously undertake the necessary skillful *abhyasa*, the discipline that is necessary. Just as the body is a force manifest in the form of hands, feet, limbs, joints, muscles, which unless they are exercised in a desirable way will not be under our control, so too the mind is a force, it is a power that requires to be disciplined.

In a general way, a blanket term for this discipline, for this exercise, is *yoga*. That is to be known as *yoga* which brings to an end the human being's mental association with pain, with all that is a source of sorrow. To bring to an end—a dissociation with, a cessation of—all that is a cause of human misery, is *yoga*.

It is to this end that our ancients have told us that if you want to stop this tendency, this inherent nature of the mind to associate itself, by habit, with all that signifies sorrow and grief, the one and only way is to start connecting and associating it with all that stands for joy, bliss and felicity. Those who have gone before us, who have experienced this bliss principle, reiterated that the only way to go beyond sorrow is to associate ourselves with this bliss principle.

For thousands of years our forefathers have been telling us that the only method of removing darkness is to bring in light. Even so, the only way to bring an end to the inherent nature of the mind to associate itself with the prolific sources of sorrow is to change its natural tendencies and initiate its association with that which is all joy, all bliss.

This is called *yoga*. This is called spiritual practice. This is called the training of the mind, the disciplining of the mind. This is the only way. By itself the mind will not change its tendency. We have to initiate it; we have to establish it. And, Lord Krishna admits that it is only possible gradually. It cannot be done abruptly.

And, one of the ways of connecting ourselves with all that is joyful, all that is blissful, is prayer. Among many other ways—which includes *japa*, remembrance, meditation, thinking, *atma chintana*, *bhagavat chintana*—prayer constitutes an effective way of linking ourselves with the Divine through mind and heart. Prayer does not bring to bear logic or reason. It is trying to move towards God through the feelings of your innermost vital being and through the force of mind, of thought.

What is the inner anatomy of the power of prayer? Simply, that it is a contact with the Supreme, which is the essence of this process of gradually training the mind to transform itself, to change its nature. Prayer, in essence, is a process of contacting Divinity and remaining in contact with Divinity. It is this fact that explains the power of prayer, the efficacy of prayer. It constitutes this contact with Divinity which is the one way of ending our constant contact with that which represents grief.

St. Francis of Assisi, in one of his many prayers, taught his brother monks that the one thing we should ask of the Lord is that He may grant us the favour of keeping us always in remembrance of Him, that He might grant us the mercy that we never forget Him and turn towards anything else even for a split second.

The illumined *guru* of Sivaji, Samartha Ramdas, taught him to pray thus: “*Sada sarvada yoga tuja gadhava. Tuja karani deha maja padava. Upeksho nako sunvanta ananta. Raghunayaka mangane hechi atha.* O Lord, grant that I may at all times, always be in a state of oneness, of *yoga*, with You. May all the activities of my life—mental, verbal, physical—be processes of totally wearing myself out for You until the very end. O Lord, Thou art the storehouse of all grace, all mercy, all goodness, all kindness, all compassion. Do not be indifferent to this plea of mine. Lord of my heart, Lord of my life, this is the one and only thing I ask of You.”

Therefore, ask one thing of God: “O Lord, grant that I may never forget to be fully aware that I live, move and have my being in You. Bless me that I may always be aware and awake to this truth, to this central fact of my life. May I be fully attentive to and totally focussed on this truth. May every breath that I breathe be in the light of this truth. For You only I exist, for You only I shall live, for You only I shall act, for You only I shall offer my entire life and its activities.” May we thus, through the prayer of our heart and mind, be in continuous contact with God, in continuous *yoga*!

85. YOU DECIDE THE DIRECTION THE MIND WILL TAKE

Loving adorations to revered and beloved Gurudev who ever draws you near to him morning after morning that you may begin your morning in a spiritual, *sattvic*, *yogic* way, that you

may enter the day through a period of silent, inner contemplation of the ever-present Divine. You start the day with an advantage, not a handicap.

The moment you emerge from sleep into wakefulness, the mind starts its activity. It depends upon you what direction this activity will take, whether it will be left to itself—cluttered up with whatever dreams you might have had or whatever *vasanas* (subtle desires) may arise—or whether it shall be given a noble, sublime upward direction. This is precisely what you are doing when you sit here morning after morning.

You are the silent, inner witnessing Light of lights beyond all darkness. You are the silent witness observing all the three states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep. Your consciousness shines in all the three periods. It is for you to decide what you will make of this great instrument called the mind, which is no other than the supreme power of the Divine, *sakti*. It is for you to decide how you are going to apply that *sakti* today, and the decision takes place in the first part of the waking consciousness, the waking hour.

Therefore, very significantly, when the half hour of inner prayer and meditation is over, you open your eyes and the first thing you utter is the prayer: “*namostv anantaya sahasra-murtaye sahasra-padakshi-siroru-bahave; sahasra-namne purushaya sasvate sahasra-koti-yuga-dharine namah.*” You salute that Being who is endless; It is forever. It is He who appears before you in innumerable forms. That means that all forms are His forms. As you open your eyes and behold the day, everything you perceive is Divine and not mundane. It is Spirit, not material.

You move into a world which is one hundred per cent spiritual! In all directions, in and through all forms, you perceive only the one, eternal, endless Reality. In this way you do not lose, even for a split second, your contact with God. Inwardly you contact Him through concentration and meditation. Outwardly you contemplate Him through vision, through divine awareness and divine feeling. You behold Him in all things that move and move not. It is to invoke within you this vision, this *bhava*, this approach, that the silent meditation ends with this chant.

In that Being you live, move and have your being. In that Being you are rooted and perform all your *vyavahara*. Where are you? Are you in the Samadhi Hall? No, you are in God. Are you in Rishikesh? No, you are in God. Are you in India? No, you are in God. Are you on the planet Earth? No, you are in God. Are you in the solar universe? Even if your consciousness is this expanded, you are rooted in God and God is rooted in you.

This is the truth about the spiritual seeker. He is one who is ever rooted in God, because this Samadhi Hall, Rishikesh, India, Earth, this solar universe are all in God. It is this dimension that should be awake in your heart. It is this perception that should animate your vision. Then no matter where you are, what you are doing, you are in God and God is in you. You don't live upon Earth, you live in a divine realm.

And when you live in a divine realm, to be divine, to feel divinely, to act divinely becomes natural and normal for you. It is not an artificial effort. It is not something you try to create within yourself, bring into being. You spontaneously know that this is the truth, the fact of your life.

Therefore, whatever you chant when you emerge from your silent half hour of meditation or inner prayer, let that pervade your heart and mind and entire consciousness. And let your entire day be filled with that vision. May you know that wherever you are, even physically, you are in God. It is not in *bhava* only, physically you are in God, because other than God nothing exists.

He is not only the hidden Spirit within. When He is in earth, water, fire, air and ether, He is also in names and forms. A person who hasn't this perception has to eliminate the name and form and see the inner essence. But when one is filled with this perception, then He is everything; even the names and forms are God and God alone.

It is this vision that is the secret of making all your life divine, all your life spiritual. Everything automatically becomes *yogic* wherever you move. Wherever your mind moves, it moves in God; it contacts God everywhere. Everything becomes a continuous process of *yoga*. Whatever vision is enshrined in your heart, that alone you behold in the universe outside.

This is the key to spontaneous living in God. May this divine vision be granted to you by the all-pervading, ever-present Divinity. And may you be successful in living a divine life, and thus enter into the realm of eternal blessedness and bliss in this very body!

86. MIND WAS NOT GIVEN TO BE A PROBLEM

In this world of *prakriti*, *rajo guna* being predominant, there is always movement. *Rajo guna* is motion; it is movement; it is activity. It is part of your *svabhava*, your nature, but it is not part of your *nija svarupa* (true nature) which is *paripurna* (all-full). In *paripurna* there is no movement because there is no necessity of movement. There is no achieving, no attaining, because it is the *nitya-prapta*, *nitya-paripurna satta*, ever-attained, ever-full Reality. Its totality can never diminish, never alter, for the simple reason that it is *satya*, the Truth, the Reality. Anything that alters is not Reality. That which is Reality is unalterable, unchangeable.

Knowing that in life activity and movement are an inevitable, essential and indispensable part of it, the wise *sadhaka* ponders deeply and selects the wisest direction in which to channelise this activity, this movement, so that this inevitable, indispensable movement takes the form of progress, takes the form of an enhancement of all that is *satyam*, *sivam* and *sundaram*, (true, auspicious and beautiful), an augmentation and enhancement of all that is blessed, holy, noble, sublime, divine, all that represents the ultimate perfection.

That is the whole thrust of a *sadhaka's* spirit. It is an ascent; it is not a stagnation; it is not a descent. Nor is it going round and round without arriving anywhere. It is not a futile activity; it is not a non-productive activity; it is not a useless and abortive activity. A *sadhaka's* life—all thought, action and speech—is creative; it is constructive. It is in the right direction because it is purposefully channelised in the right direction towards the good life, towards the ultimate, great Goal.

This is the essence of evolution. It is the true essence of progress, of life in its real meaning. For life is a great endowment for attainment, for achievement. The essence of life is a movement towards perfection, for this perfection is inherent in every *jivatman*. A *jivatman* is divine by its very origin. It is perfection manifest with limitations. Removing the limitations and manifesting the perfection that is already there is the long and short of spirituality, *yoga*, *sadhana*, *abhyasa* and true life.

Common sense tells you this truth about yourself, but we do not put two and two together. The truth about the *jivatman* is that it is unchangeable total perfection; it is imperishable bliss, but it is bliss involved in *prakriti*. To once again rise beyond *prakriti* and be what one is is the one thing desirable, the one thing necessary. But, even referring to liberating oneself from *prakriti* is a misnomer. It is a limitation of human language. For, when Brahman cannot be bound—because there is no second principle to bind Brahman—then there is no question of bondage.

If there are two things, one can bind the other. But, as Brahman is absolute, non-dual and unitary, bondage is out of the question; it is meaningless. And the *jivatman* being no other than *brahma-tattva*, bondage is meaningless for the *jivatman*. Therefore, it is not so much a matter of liberating yourself from the *prakriti* that limits you, but realising your unlimited nature and your *abadhita satta* (unlimited existence).

You cannot be affected by *prakriti*. *Prakriti* may be there, but it is helpless, it is powerless to affect the ever-liberated, ever-perfect state of *brahma-tattva* which is your *nija svarupa*. Therefore, the essence of being is the awareness that I am ever free, ever perfect, ever pure. And, *sadhana* or *yoga* or *abhyasa* means the elimination of all other *vrittis* (thoughts) contrary to this essence of being, elimination of all other *vrittis* in *prakriti* that is proximate to you in the form of mind and intellect, through a dynamic and irresistible, ever-active *vichara* and *viveka* and a non-identification of yourself with *prakriti*.

This is the inner mechanics of true *sadhana*. Mind has not been given to the *jivatman* to be a problem. Mind was given to be a solution to the problem of the many. Because many is *mithya* (unreal). One and one alone is *satya* (truth). Therefore to overcome this delusion of the many, mind was given. Unfortunately, mind has been allowed to become a problem by our negligence, by our inactivity, by our not manifesting our *satchidananda*-being within the screen of our consciousness. Even as your breath manifests itself with unbroken continuity in your physical body, the *satchidananda*-consciousness should keep on manifesting itself with unbroken continuity on the screen or the inner mental sky of your being. The light of *satchidananda* should ever be falling, ever be shining upon the inner screen of your consciousness keeping it thus in a state of Truth-awareness.

That should be continuous, and it should require no effort because it is always there; it is spontaneous. The only effort is to keep away indolence, lethargy, laziness, mental indifference—*tamo guna*. That is the one thing needful, and, therefore, there should be a dynamic, purposeful direction of the *rajo guna* of *prakriti* in the direction of the sublime Reality. The entire interior should be a dynamic forward movement cleaving through all indolence, lethargy and indifference.

To that end, be up and doing. To that end, *uttishthata jagrata prapya varan nibodhata* (Arise, awake, having reached the wise become enlightened). That is the ever-recurring eternal call. Heed that call. Respond to this call. Do what it says and crown yourself with blessedness. That is life! That is what we are here for!

D. DEVOTION, FAITH, SURRENDER

Truth alone can liberate us. Falsehood cannot liberate us. Deluded thinking is a trap. Mind is the seat of delusion. Mind is the seat of erroneous thinking. We do not realise it, but it is so. Mind is, therefore, the main barrier between you and He who is nearer to you than your nearest, the indwelling Reality, God. Therefore, with humility and simplicity we must approach God in true faith, in absolute trust, setting aside contrary notions that are created by the mind which *is* maya.

87. UNDIVIDED LOVE

Yesterday, an elderly lady approached me and said, “Over forty years ago your Master promised me that I would certainly attain Self-knowledge, *atma-jnana*. For forty years I have been striving. Why have I not yet attained?”

It is in this context that I share with you this vital factor, this vital inner state, this one vital condition that one might call undivided love. I answered the person: “Yes, it is true that you have been striving for forty years, but at the same time you have also been striving for many other things. If it had been *atma-jnana* only for which you had been striving—that being the only desire, only wish, only yearning of your entire being, the longing of your heart, that being the only aspiration of your entire life, and you had directed all your love towards that attainment—who knows, by this time you would not be putting this question to me.”

Then I asked: “Did Holy Master say when you would attain?” She said, “No.” I said: “Lord Krishna said: ‘*bahu-nam janmanam ante jnanavan mam prapadyate* (At the end of many births the wise man takes refuge in Me).’ When your preoccupations and occupations are many, then you have to bide your time. Self-knowledge has been one of your loves, but in addition you had your children, your husband, your home, your possessions, your social life and your own personal life where many things were important to you.”

So, the progress of the spiritual life, its evolution, is a gradual diminishing of diversities in our interests and occupations and a progressive focussing on that one ultimate self-chosen goal of our life. We have to carefully test our lives and see whether this process is taking place—a gradual narrowing down of the area of our desires, aspirations, activities and occupations.

In the beginning, it is many, it is diverse and the field is large. And as *sadhana*, spiritual life, proceeds, it tends to become lesser and lesser. But even that is not enough. The ultimate aim, the

desideratum, is to arrive at a stage when there is a total unification of the entire being upon the one non-dual aim, object, goal of all aspirations. When that comes, it heralds a new day.

This is the teaching put before us by all the saints and sages. In the Gita it is referred to as *ananya bhakti* (*ananya*—where there is no other). When Jesus was asked: “Which commandment is the greatest of all?” He replied: “The Lord our God is one, and you shall love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” And Lord Krishna said: “*tam eva saranam gaccha sarvabhavena bharata* (Seek refuge in Him with all your being, O Arjuna).”

So, in various ways the scriptures point us towards undivided love. For it is said that where the love of your heart is, there your mind is. And where your mind is, towards that you will inexorably move. That is the law. Where the heart and mind are, that is the direction your life takes.

And, for overcoming all the distractions of the mind, the restless wanderings of the mind, the one thing needful is undivided love. Even in ordinary life, when you like something, when your heart is centred on it, then you spontaneously engage in it, you are drawn towards it and absorbed in it. Even the passing of time is not felt. Where there is this liking, this love, everything becomes natural, spontaneous, easy, effortless. There is no struggle.

Have you got the same liking for *brahma-jnana*? Have you got the same taste for *sadhana*, for the Divine Name, for ultimate illumination? Have you got the same keen interest, keen longing? Then it comes. But we are beings who have diverse longings, diverse interests. Many things are tasteful to us—too many, one might say. There is not that undivided love.

There is a verse that says: “*kantha-avarodhana-samaye smaranam kutas te.*” The poet asks: “If for your whole life you have been dwelling on and thinking of objects as objects, then how can you hope that at the last moment you will suddenly become a great *bhakta*, start thinking about God and repeating His Name?” He says: “Impossible! Therefore, ever cultivate the continuous, unbroken habit of God-thought.”

Similarly, we should cultivate and harbour within our hearts undivided love. Such love has to be carefully cultivated by doing everything that you do with a deep love in your heart: “I do this for God, for the love of Him. Everything I do—sitting, eating, drinking, lying down, working, typing, speaking, moving—I do for the love of that Being who dwells within me, who is constantly by my side, in whose presence I am living each moment of my life.

“I live, move and have my being in Him. Therefore, everything that constitutes my life will be done with love for Him, for His sake, leaving nothing out. *Kayena vacha manasendriyair va buddhyatmanava prakriter svabhavat, karomi yat yad sakalam parasmai, narayanayeti samarpayami* (O Lord, whatsoever I do through my body, speech, mind, senses, intellect, soul or unconscious natural impulses, I dedicate as an offering unto Thee, the supreme, all-pervading Spirit).”

Therefore, with great love, offer up everything to the Lord—everything—mental, verbal, physical, winking, breathing, sleeping, waking up, whatever constitutes your life. Leave nothing

out, for you are in His presence. And, if you are offering everything that you are doing to that adorable Presence Divine, it cannot be offered with indifference, it cannot be offered without love. It will be dry then. It will not be fit to be offered to that Being. Even the least thing must be done with devotion, *bhava*. Nothing should be left out. Do all things with intense *bhava*, with great love.

So, let this be you. Be a centre of love. Be a constant stream of love. In all that you do, let this love manifest, let it be part of it. Then it becomes acceptable to God. With great love, Vidurani fed Lord Krishna the skin of the plantain fruit she had peeled. In her joy and excitement she mistakenly offered the Lord the skin rather than the fruit. But it was so filled with the love of Vidurani that the Lord relished it and went on eating. Not only one plantain skin, a second also, a third and a fourth. He was not imbibing the skin of a fruit; He was imbibing pure love.

If such love is exercised in everything that you do—in the minutest thing that you are engaged in doing day after day—feeling the immediate presence of the Lord everywhere, at every moment, then it will be possible for you to live in love, to act in love, to speak in love, to do everything, even the most insignificant thing, with love.

This will grow into undivided love. You will become an embodiment of undivided love. You will become love personified. And thus the portals to supreme blessedness will be opened up. You will not have to go to the Lord; He will come to you. The Lord will come to you.

He is without and within already: “I dwell in the hearts of all. I am constantly by your side.” Again and again, in half a dozen ways, the Lord tries to tell us this truth through His admonitions and His divine wisdom teachings to Arjuna.

Thus, let everything that you do be done with undivided love. Then you have the key. You have the secret key for ending up in total undivided love—which is God now, here. That love is God now, here, in whose presence we are all gathered together. May His grace shower upon you!

88. DEVOTION THAT LIBERATES

Worshipful adorations to the one, non-dual Universal Consciousness that alone exists, that alone pervades everywhere, eternally. May we seek to adore and worship It with our entire being. May we be aware that It is not a remote, unapproachable Reality, but that It is more real than anything that we are perceiving through our five senses. May Its grace be upon you all!

Bhakti or devotion is of two kinds. The more common is the ceremonial and ritualistic method of expressing our devotion through elaborate external worship. This *bhakti* always has a tinge of self-seeking through the meticulous following of the injunctions of the scriptures regarding *puja*: “May the Lord be propitiated and pleased. May He grant me prosperity, good health, well-being, progress on all fronts—domestic, social, professional, financial.” So, there is always a give and take.

But the *bhakti* that crowns us with liberation, illumination, is *nishkama* (selfless). This *bhakti* seeks nothing but the great privilege of loving the Lord. This *bhakti* seeks nothing other than the Lord Himself—God for God’s sake, devotion for the sake of devotion. It not only seeks nothing else, but it goes one step further. Even if something is given, it refuses to accept it: “*varan na yacha raghunandana; yushmad-pada’bja-prema-bhaktih satatam mama’stu*—I seek no boon. I seek no favour other than one-pointed devotion at Thy lotus feet.” It is this *bhakti* that is to be practised if you want to make this life worthwhile, attain the supreme Goal and become forever blessed.

The *bhakta* sees the defects of all created things: *yad drisyam tannasyam* (Everything perceived is subject to decay). He realises that all created things are temporary, transitory, subject to decay and dissolution. They are perishable and imperfect. They are useful, but they can become a diversion, a bondage, a net, a nuisance and a prolific source of sorrow also.

Therefore the *bhakta* does not run after them. He says: “I shall be wise; I shall not be foolish. I do not want petty things. Everything created is *alpa* (petty). Everything here from the Creator down to a blade of grass is only a delusion. Out of these perishable names and forms, I cannot get imperishable satisfaction and happiness.” Therefore, the *bhakta* rejects them.

That is the *bhakti* that one should practise. And this *bhakti* only becomes possible if we use our intellect to do *vichara* (enquiry) in order to generate *viveka* (discrimination). *Vichara* and *viveka* will produce a *vairagya* (dispassion) that is real, that is enduring. And *vairagya* is the essential condition for progressing in devotion, meditation and illumination.

Lord Krishna has made this plain to us in the sixth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. *Bhakti*, *jnana* and *dhyana* (meditation) are to be supported by *vairagya*. Then alone one perseveres until the attainment of illumination and enlightenment. *Bhakti*, *jnana*, *vairagya*, these triune streams, have to exist together, flowing in an unbroken current within the hidden inner dimension of our spiritual being.

This is to be remembered always. This is to be cherished and nourished. This is to be practised and perfected. This is the guarantee of spiritual attainment, illumination, liberation and divine perfection here and now in this very life in this very body.

Keeping this in mind, diligently exercise wisdom in the form of constant right enquiry, reflection and discrimination. Practise resolutely, motivelessly, desireless devotion and love for the Divine. And support both these by a state of permanently established dispassion, *vairagya*. May the Supreme Reality whom we adore grant you these three and crown your life with blessedness. May you become embodiments of *bhakti*, *jnana* and *vairagya*!

89. FAITH MUST BE LIVING

Worshipful homage unto that supreme, eternal, all-pervading Reality, the beginningless and endless, cosmic Spirit Divine—that is within and without, above, below and all around us, and which is interpenetrating every cell of our very being!

Do you feel Its presence in every cell of your very being? Do you feel Its presence with you always—to your right and to your left, in front of you and behind, above, below and all around you, surrounding everyone you see? Do you see every tree and plant surrounded by the divine presence of God? Do you see every creature, large and small, that you encounter from morning till night surrounded by this Divine Presence?

The Supreme Being shining with the splendour of a million suns is shining here and now over each and every one of you. Do you feel yourself in this light? Are you living in this light? Are you walking in this light? If not, what is your belief?

Are you literally trying to evoke this feeling, this *bhava*, within you? Are you trying to live in the light of this truth, the fact that our ancients realised—their living experience—in their own deep inner lives and then proclaimed to others. *Namostv-anantaya sahasra-murtaye sahasra-padakshi-siroru-bahave* (Salutations to the Infinite Lord of a thousand forms, who has a thousand feet, eyes, heads and hands).

What are these words to you? Are they only *svadhyaya* or do they have some vital, living meaning for you—a meaning that enters into your very life every day, that is with you when you sit, stand, eat, sleep, walk and talk, when you are alone or amidst a hundred people? Are you trying to recapture, trying to actually relive the experience of your ancient sages and seers?

If you are not doing it, what value is your spiritual life? It is a dead spiritual life with no living flame of aspiration to enter into that experience. If the sages entered into glorious realisation, what is that to you and me? In what way does it make even one whit of a change in your present state or my present state unless and until it is actively imbibed, actively made a part of our own consciousness?

Yajnavalkya may be a liberated soul, but what does it mean to us if we are bound by our senses, if we are bound by our desires, urges, cravings, sentiments, emotions, imaginations and memories? If we are creatures dominated by our lesser self, then what does the presence of the higher Self mean to us? What value does it have?

You may not disbelieve it, but your belief and faith is not a living faith. It is not a faith that transforms your being. It is not a faith that urges your every movement; it does not infill your day-to-day life. A living faith is what is necessary. A painted picture of a blazing fire may look absolutely realistic, but it will not keep you warm; it cannot dry your clothes; it cannot even light an incense stick. What is to be our spirituality? A living fire or a painted picture?

These are points to ponder. These are things you should deeply consider every day. What exactly is the status of your spirituality? Is it a realistic painted picture or is it a real living fire that can revive you, bring circulation once again to your numbed body?

Consider these things that we chant every day: “I salute You, the infinite One who has countless innumerable forms.” “You are my all-in-all.” “He is present inside and outside.” What are these innumerable forms you mention in your chanting? What is God to you? Is He nearer than the

nearest? To utter *slokas* and chants is very good. It evokes *bhava*. But to enter deeply into their meaning and imbibe their spirit, make it part of your life, is better. It is the one thing needful.

You should absorb all that you chant. It should bring a new vision to your eyes, your gaze. It should pervade in your own being as a force that grants you a divine *bhava* and divine vision. It should be a living factor in your life. That is the purpose, the objective, of remembering and chanting these sublime spiritual utterances day after day. That is the main purpose.

They must enter into your bones, into your every cell and begin to transform your life, be part of your life, become a force to take your life onward, forward and Godward unto realisation and liberation. They are meant for it. That is how you should relate yourself to these scriptural injunctions that in so many ways declare unto us that all this universe is infilled with the Lord.

Do it now! Time does not wait. Life ebbs away. Move towards the terminal point. Past time does not return. Realise this now and invest in the future by utilising the present to the highest use.

90. WHAT SHOULD BE OUR BHAVA AT THE FEET OF THE LORD?

Most of you are familiar with pictures depicting Lord Rama with Lakshmana, Janaki and Hanuman. In those pictures, Hanuman is always shown sitting at Rama's feet: "I am at the feet of the Lord. I am the servant of the feet of the Lord, sitting at Rama's feet."

And much though we might have heard about his terrible deeds in Lanka, overcoming powerful *asuras* and despatching them to the abode of death, much as we might hear about his valour and his valorous deeds, extraordinary in nature, yet in the presence of Lord Rama we see that he is always sitting at His feet with folded hands and bowed head, ever intent and desirous of carrying out the will of the Lord: "Not my will, but Thine, O Lord."

This way of life depicted by Hanuman is for our edification. For, in the presence of the Lord only worship is possible; humility alone adorns the person. Ego is not becoming. It is unbecoming to manifest the self-assertive, selfish nature or egoism in the presence of God.

Let this picture of Hanuman be upon your mind's screen, your mental vision, always. If such a great personality, so strong, so redoubtable, so invincible, so full of courage, boldness and bravery, if he were to be a humble servant, in servitude, always holding himself in readiness to carry out the Lord's will, how much more should be our *bhava* of being at the service of the Lord? For, what are we compared to Hanuman?

Ponder this particular aspect of your life. We all believe in the all-pervading presence of God: "Thou art omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient." Our belief should not be a dry belief, a sort of intellectual concession we make to the scriptures and the exalted experiences of bygone sages and seers. "Let us behold Thee in all these names and forms. Let us serve Thee in all these names and forms." Does only our tongue utter these words, or do we feel these words in our heart?

If we do, if this is our faith, our true belief, our conviction, then in His presence would it be possible for us to be egoistic, self-assertive, selfish, vehement, aggressive? Would it be possible?

If our belief in the omnipresence of God is a living faith, a principle upon which we live our life, then safeguarded by this faith and conviction, we shall never dream of thinking anything unworthy of His inner indwelling presence, never dream of uttering anything unworthy about Him, never ever engage in any action that is unworthy of His divine presence. Rather, naturally, spontaneously, irresistibly, inevitably, your life will become divine. Your life will become one of virtue, humility, simplicity, having a spirit of service and practising the presence of God within and without. Your life will become ideal, noble, sublime, capable of bestowing upon you the peace that passeth understanding.

Thus, we would do well to reflect upon these great truths and lofty realisations which we have received as our inheritance from the sages of our radiant past. What could be the tremendous implications and import of these truths upon our day-to-day living, moving and having our being? They can be the key to blessedness, an unfailing guarantee ensuring against all acts unworthy of our devotion, our discipleship and our dedicated spiritual living—guaranteeing and ensuring that nothing in us will ever be unworthy of our ideal.

These truths are not to be neglected, not to be taken lightly or bypassed; we are not to be indifferent to them. These truths are to be deeply reflected upon, pondered, and earnestly applied in our daily life; they are to be recognised and paid attention to at each step, every moment, always. Then they become truths that liberate us, truths that transform us, truths that make our life divine. That is what we are after. That is what we are living for, striving for, working for. And these truths can make our life sublime, make our striving meaningful, worthwhile, make our *sadhana* fruitful in God-experience. There is no doubt about it.

91. A FAITH THAT SUSTAINS

You are the most fortunate human individuals on earth in that in this present incarnation you have been brought into the life spiritual. You have been drawn towards the Eternal, and you have been endowed with aspiration, a spirit of enquiry, and discrimination between the real and the unreal, between the eternal and the non-eternal, between the permanent and the evanescent. You have been endowed with discrimination and dispassion—priceless blessings beyond compare.

You are most fortunate, extremely blessed in that you have been brought into this way of life, directing your entire life towards the Supreme, and have been provided with all facilities for your evolution, all conveniences. You also have inconveniences, obstacles, difficulties and problems so that you may know how to deal with and overcome them. Due to them you may evolve spiritually, round off your angularities, arouse into wakefulness your inner resources.

So, you are fortunate to have all facilities, all conveniences and also all inconveniences which are blessings in disguise—seeming problems but means for evolving further and further. They are necessary ingredients for arousing from within you your inner resources: endurance,

common sense, innate wisdom to turn stumbling blocks into stepping stones, innate wisdom to look at things from a different angle. Thus, in every way you have been provided with everything required to move towards divine perfection—which is your destiny.

Therefore, great has been the grace, greater still has been the blessings, and greatest of all has been your determination to stick it out in spite of all apparent adamant obstructions and obstacles: “This is all part of God’s divine plan for me. I accept it *in toto* and deal with it with wisdom, understanding, patience and perseverance as did the real seekers of yore in times bygone, those who reaped the benefit, the golden harvest of such perseverance.

“I have total trust in the Divine. When He has called me into this life, He will never abandon me. There is a meaning and purpose behind everything that He is now making me undergo. Deep within me I know that in all these things He is by my side. The Divine never abandons. Believing in Him, no one is lost. Placing one’s hands in His hands, one is sure of being guided to the destination. When He has called me to this life, He means me to live it to the ultimate end. I have set my hands to the plough and there is no turning back. I shall persist, persevere, until I reap the golden harvest.”

Such indeed is the stuff of those who achieve, those whose lofty, inspired examples of what a seeker should be fill the Upanishads. Therefore, I ask each one of you to persist, persevere, look not back. Forge ahead! Live in the Divine. Be aware only of the Divine. Think only of the Divine.

Set your mind, intellect, heart, your entire being, upon that one and only Reality of which you are an inseparable part, with which you are essentially one. Have your being fixed upon the glorious destiny that is yours as a birthright, that is nothing short of Divine-consciousness which is beyond all limited states of awareness, beyond time and space, name and form, and beyond this little, petty, false, deceptive human identity.

This human identity is the greatest of all obstacles. It is the last to be overcome, and, truth to tell, the one and only obstacle. All other obstacles are offshoots of this one, great obstacle—the “I”. “Then shall I be free, when ‘I’ shall cease to be. I am my problem. I am the shackles that bind me, the chains that hold me bound. I am *samsara*, I am *prapancha*, I am *maya*. I am my bondage.

“But for me, I am ever free. I am never bound. I am eternally pure, awakened and divinely perfect. I have neither birth nor death nor old age nor disease. That is me. But ‘I’ stands in the way of realising the me that I am in reality. *Mano buddhy ahankara chittani na’ham, chid-ananda rupah sivoham sivoham* (I am neither mind nor intellect, nor the ego-sense, nor even the mind-stuff. I am of the form of pure consciousness and bliss. Verily I am all auspiciousness and bliss). All that I think I am, all that I am bound up with, that I am not.”

May the Divine continue to shower grace upon you as it has been showering upon you since birth into this present physical body. Unknown to you, the Divine has been shaping you gradually for this noble, sublime life through various means from infancy to childhood to adolescence to adulthood. He has been working, directing, moulding, putting opportunities in your way, bringing obstacles, giving bitter experiences so that you may realise what life is, and bringing noble experiences so that you are confirmed in your faith in the goodness of God, in the goodness of human nature.

As a mother does for a helpless infant, He has brought you all that is needful, preparing you for this glorious renunciation, preparing you for this glorious *nivritti marga*, the path that leads beyond time into eternity, the path that leads to the Eternal Reality.

If you look back you will understand many events that you did not understand. God does more miracles through painful and unpleasant experiences than He does through sunshine and picnics, through pleasant experiences. When we understand, we are filled with gratitude, and we wonder why we did not understand. You only have to look at the present world and you will know what you have been liberated from. Therefore, we are filled with a deep emotion of humble acknowledgment of His perennial grace, a recognition of His ever-present grace and blessings in our life.

For verily I tell all of you here that the Divine has lifted you up from unrealities into the Reality. Verily I assure you that He has lifted you up from darkness into Light. And this is *tri-vara-satya*, thrice true. In truth and in fact, He has lifted us up from spiritual death into that flowing stream, that great upward movement unto immortality and everlasting life in the eternal Divine-consciousness that we call Brahman or That or Allah or Nirvana or the Kingdom of Heaven—a state of perfection. He has lifted you up from unrealities unto the great Reality, from darkness unto Light and from death unto everlasting Life in that state of awareness that we call by all these various terms.

Rejoice, be humble, be grateful, and stop not till the Goal is reached. Do not move in any other direction. Do not lose any opportunity. Do not allow a single moment to pass by without keeping up with this ascent of the spirit unto its own, unto its native state, unto its eternal natural condition of *satchidananda*-consciousness, which is the only real thing, that abides forever, that exists always.

Live in the awareness that God is here and now. He abides within you, and you ever abide in Him. This is the only truth. All others are figments. They are fancies and fantasies. The only truth is the here and now God and the fact that He abides in you and you abide in Him. Live in this truth! Glory be to each and every one of you! Glory be to God who has thus graced you!

92. RESPONDING TO THE CALL OF GOD

Worshipful homage to the infinite, imponderable Cosmic Reality, the transcendental Absolute, which is, at once, farther than the farthest and, nevertheless, nearer than the nearest. Remote, beyond the reach of the mind, closer to you than yourself, everywhere present, nowhere visible to this fleshy physical eye, nevertheless appearing in an infinite variety of names and forms, the one power behind all things, the one and the only doer and director of all things that take place and happen, that Being is the goal of your life. Attaining and experiencing that Reality alone you will ultimately attain total satisfaction, peace that is forever, for all times, and which peace is the greatest of all joy, happiness and bliss.

May the grace of that Supreme Divinity be upon you all, as it has been upon you throughout your life. Whether you know it or not, this grace has surrounded you, pursued you, impelling you in the right direction. It has irresistibly drawn you towards a way of life that is like a light in the darkness, that is the life sublime, the good life, the divine life.

Whether you saw its workings or not, whether you recognised it or not, it has been there propelling, pulling and attracting you in the right direction, making you take the right decisions, rescuing you in dilemmas and doubts, taking you through seemingly agonising situations, but always towards the ultimate peace, the greatest good, your supreme welfare, towards that gain attaining which there is no greater gain to be attained.

Grace pursues the sincere seeking soul, sometimes even in spite of itself. And grace does not always appear in nice and beautiful clothing. As the poet put it: Not perceiving what it is, the seeking soul is sometimes even frightened and tries to run away. But when God has chosen, there is no way of man escaping. When at last, not able to run further, the fearful, panting, escaping soul drops down exhausted, it feels the protective proximity of That which was pursuing it.

Thus, the grace of the Divine has been pursuing you and drawing you in the direction of God, not with dire intent, but with the greatest love, compassion and goodwill and for your highest good. It has been drawing you in the direction of God which is the ONLY GOOD. Mother is good, father is also good, and your relatives are good to you, but God is father, mother, relative and friend. He is all this and more too. That is the truth about your life, whether it is sweet or bitter, tender or hard.

He is always drawing you in one direction, pushing, prompting, taking you in the direction of your highest welfare. How much gratitude we should feel! If we only recognise it, we have sometimes been blessed and graced in spite of ourselves.

Let us, therefore, in humility and gratefulness now purposefully cooperate with this grace, go along with this grace, grasp the hand of this grace, and willingly, with all our being, allow ourselves to be drawn in the direction that grace wants us to move—forward, upward and Godward.

This is wisdom. This is appreciation for what God has been doing for us. This is responding to the call of God—allowing God to help us by cooperating with His grace.

Being all-pervading, God is present everywhere. Even so, being beyond time, He is now, here. Not even for a split second in the life of a *jivatma* in this *samsara*, not even for a split second in the life of any one of us, is He ever absent. It is an impossibility. All other things may be possible, but that God is absent in the life of man is an absolute impossibility.

93. THE SURE SOLUTION

Worshipful homage unto the supreme, cosmic Spirit Divine—the eternal, the beginningless and endless, all-pervading, ever-present immanent Reality—the indwelling Spirit Divine that makes each and every name and form a moving temple of the living Divine Spirit!

That Being is farther than the farthest, nearer than the nearest. He is all-pervading, and, therefore, envelops us from all sides, surrounds us everywhere. In Him we live, move and have our being; yet at the same time, He is within us as the centre of our very being. We cannot say that He is only this and not that. Nor can we say that He is only that and not this. He is within as well as without, and His mystery is beyond both within and without.

Therefore, if you wish to meditate, to close your eyes to see Him within, you can equally well open your eyes and see Him everywhere. If meditation means dwelling upon that Reality, you can thus make your entire life a constant, unbroken meditation. Seeing with the eyes, hearing with the ears, touching with the hands, breathing with your nostrils could become a meditation. For all that is seen, heard, tasted, touched or smelt is the same Reality upon whom *yogis* in caves, deep in the jungle, close their eyes, go inward and meditate upon.

Everything that the mind does, whatever it comprehends, thinks about, conceives of, has ever conceived of, will ever conceive of, is that Being and none else: *yad bhutam yachcha bhavyam* (Whatever was and whatever will be is the Purusha). And it is not only the outer form—what we see—that constitutes living Divinity, but that which we do not see as well. It was not only that which Arjuna's stunned gaze beheld with his open eyes that constituted God, but even the very innermost essence and content of that which he was beholding was God. There was nothing but God and God alone, within and without.

Sarvam brahmamayam (All this is filled with Brahman). *Sarvam khalvidam brahma* (All this is Brahman). *Neha nanasti kinchana* (There are not many here). This is exactly what the Upanishads want you to contemplate. This is what the Gita wisdom teachings want you to contemplate. They are not for reading. They are not for knowing. They are for being and they are for doing.

If you can diligently cultivate this true vision and true understanding, then this indeed can become the one, unflinching solution for the problem of alienation from God, for the problem of not being able to remember God, for the problem of remaining in a state of God-forgetfulness. For, when we see that God alone is, both within and without, there is no other course left for us but to surrender, leave everything in His hands. Surrender, leave it to Him; then the “no solution” situation vanishes, for you have found a solution. Surrendering everything to God becomes the ultimate best solution. For then you are free from the problem; it becomes non-existent in your life. The problem is His concern.

If you cannot untie a knot but keep struggling with it and finally succeed, you have found the solution. Or, if you cannot untie the knot, if you hand it over to someone else to untie it, then too you are free of the vexing situation of struggling to untie the knot. And in this case the someone else to whom you hand over the knot happens to be the best person: God Himself.

Sometimes, some other person may not be available to take over your problem, make you problem-free, be the total solution. But God is always available, at all times, actually waiting to be summoned. He is the one Being upon whose availability we can totally rely, totally depend. So one who trusts this Being and depends upon Him no longer has any room for anxiety. Before you call, He is already there. Therefore, He IS the solution—the ultimate solution—immediately available for everyone.

When you sit in a ferry to cross a river, you are not anxious about how you are going to get across. There is a boatman there, and he has the responsibility. So you relax because you know someone else has that burden, that responsibility. And God is the ferryman of the bark of our life across this ocean of time and space. This is the truth. This is the actual fact.

There is a Hindi *bhajan* that says: “*Bhava samudra sukhada nava eka Rama nam* (God’s Name is the boat that enables us to cross this ocean of worldly existence easily).” When His mere Name can be the sure boat to take you across the ocean of phenomenal existence, what about Him?

The devotee may fail God, but God has never failed a devotee. A mystic of South India, speaking in the language of Karnataka, used an epithet meaning: “Since creation, since humanity came into being, there has never been a human individual who has trusted fully in God and has been harmed or destroyed. There is no such instance.”

For God is our very own more than anyone else in this entire universe. The Being whom we term as God is the only Being with whom our relationship is real, is true, is lasting. It is a spiritual fact, actual and factual. All other relationships terminate, vanish. They are a temporary phenomenal episode in this time-space universe. They did not exist before; they will cease to exist soon after. Therefore, they are only temporary and transitory; whereas our eternal relationship is with the Universal Soul, our all-in-all.

If this fact is deeply contemplated, one is at peace, one is at ease. All torment ceases, all fever leaves the individual soul. All is well, and God is where He ought to be—not far away in heaven, but in the very centre of your life. All your life goes on around Him as the centre.

He becomes to you a here and now, immediately available God, a true and a real God as He was to Mira, to Surdas, to Namdev. This indeed is the objective of *sadhana*. This indeed is the goal of *sadhana*. This indeed is the fruit of *sadhana*.

94. REAL SURRENDER AND ADORATION

The essence of the life spiritual, the essence of the *sadhana* that ultimately grants you *sakshatkara* (direct realisation of the Absolute), is to set up an inner spiritual contact and a link, a relationship, with the Eternal and the Infinite. Having set up this inner spiritual link in a conscious knowing manner, having wished for it, then diligently cultivate it and keep on developing it, so that it grows and grows and begins to fill your entire consciousness, transforming your sense of personal identity connected with this world and its things and beings into a higher identity, a supramundane,

divine identity, having its meaning and relevance in its connection with a transcendental, cosmic Reality.

“I am part of It. I am not other than It. Within me is shining Its light. Within me, vibrantly alive, is that great Spirit. That is what I am. That is my reality. That is the truth of my being. I am a divine principle, a God-principle.” Thus there comes about a transformation in the inwardness of your hidden subjective awareness.

When this transformation has taken place by carrying on the unceasing cultivation and development of this new awareness and making it the most important part of your life, Godwardness becomes the inner content of all parts of your entire nature—thought, word and deed. Your entire being becomes God-oriented. It becomes a centre of Godwardness.

The great ones have declared that such a life is a real life. Such a life, thus oriented towards God, rooted in God, moving towards God, filled with God is the one sure unfailing means of attaining Him. They call it *sadhana*, *abhyasa*, *yoga*. They call it dedication, surrender, worship, service, devotion, adoration.

In worship, in adoration, we offer things to God. We feel that by offering these things, the Supreme is pleased. There was a time when we did not want to offend the Supreme. We wanted to propitiate the Supreme by offering a lamb or a goat as a sacrifice, so that He may not be wrathful or He may be pleased and grant us favours. But there has been a great deal of spiritual evolution in the human race, in human consciousness. The concept of propitiating or pleasing God still lingers, but more has been added on to it.

To reflect Him is the real worship. To glorify Him, to stand witness to His perfection is the real worship and adoration. The best offering that can be placed at the feet of the Supreme is oneself: “I surrender myself to Thee. I myself constitute the offering with which I adore You.”

In which case, one then has to strive earnestly and sincerely to make oneself worthy of being offered to the Lord. That then becomes the discipline, the earnest endeavour, the continuous *abhyasa*—to make oneself ever worthier, ever holier, ever more spiritual, ever more divine, that one may indeed become a most worthy offering to be placed at His feet as an adoration.

Therefore, the greatest thing with which you can adore God is yourself, your life. Thus, the holier you become and the holier your life becomes, the more worthy it becomes to be offered to the Lord. The more spiritual and divine that you make yourself, filling yourself with light in all parts of your being, the worthier becomes the offering you place before Him and the more glorious becomes your adoration of the Divine.

What greater thing! Not something extraneous to you other than you, but you yourself. By offering yourself is the Lord adored. Therefore, you begin to see a new dimension of *sadhana*—not engaging in doing some process but working upon yourself. Working upon yourself to make yourself perfect, ever holier, more truthful, more loving, more selfless, more devoid of the “I”, ever more devoid of all those things that are likely to put a distance between you and the Supreme becomes your *abhyasa*.

Your *sadhana* turns inward. It becomes an occult, inward process which does not require any special time, space or circumstances. But, at all times, all the waking hours of the day, this inner, subjective process can go on, so that day by day, moment by moment you try to work upon yourself, make yourself more and more worthy.

This is another way of looking at spiritual life and understanding *sadhana*. It is a dimension that is not from inward to outward, but from outward to inward, ever moving to the very depth and the centre of your very being, where you make yourself a perfect and worthy factor to be offered to the Supreme.

And this becomes possible only if there is an awakened awareness within. May God grant you that awakened awareness. May you know that the great task is to pay attention to the spiritualising and divinising of your entire being, so that you shine as a worthy votive offering at the altar of the cosmic Spirit Divine—that is everywhere present at all times in all Its fullness.

Such a worship can be ceaseless. It is upon a different dimension altogether. Such a worship constantly keeps us in an awareness of the presence of God, an awareness of God. No part of our life is left out of it. No moment is without this adoration and worship. By the totality of your being you seek to adore the source, origin, support and fulfilment of your very being.

95. DIVINE BHAVA MUST BE CONSTANT

Divinity is as near or as far from you as your *bhava* (feeling) towards It. If you have that *bhava*, It is here and now. If you lose that *bhava*, It is nowhere.

The truth is that all things exist, move and have their being in that great Reality. Countless billions and trillions of universes abide in Him as grains of sand on the seashore or drops of water in the ocean. That is His magnitude. Yet He is nearer than the nearest; He is a here and now God.

And you abide in that Being. There is no distance between you and the Eternal Reality. The distance is created by *vismriti* (forgetfulness), by *anya chintana* (thinking of other things), by *viparita jnana* (wrong knowledge). The Kathopanishad says that the proximate, the closest, is not felt or realised because the mind has become outgoing. Therefore, withdraw the mind, take it within!

But then, if it is outgoing, towards what can it go? When all that exists is the great Reality, how can it go elsewhere? It is here that the distance is created by *viparita jnana* (wrong knowledge)—that which the outgoing mind beholds through the five senses is regarded to be not God. Thus this wrong knowledge deprives you of the experience of the ever-present Reality. That Being which is everywhere present is regarded as not being present due to wrong knowledge, due to non-perception of that which is right there in front of you.

Seeing It, you fail to see It. Hearing It, you fail to hear It. Touching It, you fail to feel It. Thus, experiencing It every moment of your life, yet you regard what you see, hear and feel to be

other than Brahman. Forgetfulness and wrong knowledge deprive you of the experience of the ever-present Reality.

Neha nana'sti kinchana (Here in this creation, not even the slightest diversity exists). It is *ekameva'dvitiyam* (One alone without a second). In spite of that, we think of the many, of diversity, and, therefore, *anya chintana* (thinking of other things) brings about a break in our abidance in the thought of Brahman alone. Thus, constant *abhyasa* must be done, again and again, to evoke this *brahma-bhavana* (feeling of Brahman).

Every day we chant: "You are my mother, You are my father, You are my relative, You are my friend, You are my wealth, You are my wisdom." We then conclude with "You are everything to me, You are my all-in-all." One way this last line is interpreted is "In addition to all these which I have identified specifically, You mean everything to me, You are my all-in-all."

However, another way of interpreting this last line is "You are before me *as* everything. Therefore, Thou art my food, my clothing, my shelter; Thou art everything I behold day after day, moment after moment." If this vision and feeling is carefully invoked within our hearts, then we will behold everything from the right angle of vision, with the right *atma-bhava*, *brahma-bhava*.

It was this *bhava* that inspired the practical, secular idealism of Swami Vivekananda. He said: "Everything you do is connected with God. Nothing is unconnected. Nothing that you do is other than worship." He spoke of God in the poor, in the sick, in the distressed, and in the afflicted. He said: "Go serve them. In serving the many you are but serving the One."

The need is for constancy. When you hear these words, your heart and mind may be filled with this *bhava*. But when you return to your room everything changes back to the worldly, prosaic vision based on "I am so and so." That is because the mind cannot hold on to a lofty, sublime, high level of perception and feeling. It likes to come down. So there should be created in you a constancy in *bhava*, a constancy in your vision. As and when it goes away, it should be reinvoked, brought back. Then only will you gradually begin to ascend towards the ideal.

Constantly reinvoke the ideal in your mind and heart in your daily life. It is the only guarantee of your attaining supreme heights. Constancy in your idealism, constancy in your spiritual vision, attitude and approach, and constancy in your own *atma-buddhi* and *atma-bhava*, your thought and feeling about yourself.

There should be constancy in all these spiritual factors that go to make up a divine way of living your life. There should be constancy in order to keep this *bhava* ever there. This is the way! This is divine life!

E. THE LIVING OF OUR LIFE

Ultimately, it is one who succeeds in successfully living life in a divine way that enters into Divine-consciousness. Divine perfection being our goal, the rationale of living our life divinely is quite simple and evident. The more, in all parts of life, we strive to become and to be that which we are trying to attain, the greater the certainty of moving towards it and attaining it.

The more your life becomes filled with the God-nature, the more sure you are of attaining God-realisation. The more you bring a quality of divinity to prevail in the living of your life—in thought, words, deeds, actions and attitude—the more this way of life becomes effective in taking you towards Divine-experience.

This then is the necessity, the scientific reason behind striving to think divinely, feel divinely and to speak and act divinely. It is the rationale behind making our life a divine life. For our goal is no more, no less than fulfilling our divine destiny in life. Divine perfection, illumination and liberation is our unique mission as human beings.

Now you can see the connection between the life you are now living—the consciousness that prevails within your interior—and the supreme goal of Divine-consciousness that you are diligently striving to attain. May you grasp this important fact of the spiritual life, and try to become firmly established in the spiritual ideal by pledging to do so with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul—willingly, joyfully, enthusiastically and determinedly.

Do it so, and do it now. Herein lies your highest good, your supreme welfare, and the assurance of your fulfilment and success in life.

96. KEEP MOVING TOWARDS THE GREAT DESTINATION

You have not come upon this earth plane to remain here forever. It is a brief sojourn in a plane of existence which is not your true and permanent plane of existence. It is not your native place. You do not belong here, for you are the unborn, eternal Spirit Divine.

This is the declaration of those who have seen, known, realised, experienced, and thus are absolutely convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt about this truth, this fact—as convinced as one who holds a berry in his hand. He simply knows that it is there.

Therefore, all the great ones have addressed the pilgrim soul: “O, ye travellers upon this earth plane! You are Spirit—without dimensions, far beyond name and form, far beyond time and space—which is not caught in this finite, phenomenal universe of inert things. You being pure, eternal, unborn, imperishable Spirit are not a dweller of this gross, ever-changing, temporary, material physical plane of names and forms. They do not go together. Eternity is beyond time. You are beyond time. The Spirit transcends the limitations of matter. You transcend the limitations of matter.”

You have to reach a destination and you cannot afford to sleep by the wayside. You must be on the way. Life is the way. All other things pertaining to life are by the way. Therefore, you have to be intent upon being on the way and with alertness and vigilance carefully avoid being drawn out of the way into trivialities, into pleasure hunting. Those who hunt for pleasure do not know. It is they who are being hunted. They are the prey, yet they think that they are the hunters. They have become prey to the power of *maya*, losing themselves in the byways.

No matter how spectacular these byways may look—you may become a famous scientist, a wonderful cinema actor or a multi-billionaire—you are nothing if you lose your way. Because all these things are by the way, diversions. If the world applauds you, you have to weep in your heart, for the applause of the world is a nothing for one who has to reach a destination.

To be on the way and to keep moving upon the way is life. Everything else is death, spiritual death. Even if you pile up name, fame, applause, recognition and the wealth of the whole world, you live in spiritual poverty if you do not keep to the way and move towards the destination.

Never mistake the wayside trivialities to be the way. They may have their place for those who are still in ignorance, caught in *avidya*, groping and stumbling in the dark, who are firmly bound within the shackles of desire, craving, greed, and the sense of identification with the body and the reality of this unreal passing show. For them it is very important, so they go after it and weep bitterly in the end. For they have missed the way, lost their destination.

Let that not be your life. Let your life be characterised by wisdom, by clear perception. It is not the little things of life, the little pleasures, sense-satisfactions, titillations of the nerves that constitute life. Life is one thing, and all other things are beside life. That is the important thing to grasp. In going after little frivolities we may miss our life.

Life is the way, and the goal is God. The goal is your highest, supreme welfare, not temporary satisfaction. Therefore, ponder deeply this important fact that you are a traveller here, a pilgrim, a wayfarer. And for a traveller and a pilgrim the most important thing is the destination, and the most important thing in reaching the destination is to keep to the way, to be on the way.

The living of life in the right and proper manner, in an idealistic manner, constitutes the way. All other things are traps. They are petty diversions with no substance, no matter how great the world may value them. For the world is in a deep, deep delusion of Self-forgetfulness, in a state of deep slumber, dense darkness, firm bondage. Avoid this woeful condition. For you have been given the gift of an awakening, of a clear perception of what you are, why you are here, what the destination is and what the essence of life is.

The essence of life is to keep living your life, not to go after pleasant sense-satisfactions. They do not constitute the essence of life. They are episodes. They are mere frills. Therefore, keep to the way, and know that you are a passing pilgrim. Beware, be cautious, be warned and keep yourself in a state of wakefulness so that you are not diverted into petty, little byways, no matter how pleasant.

That is the great thing needful. For life is short and time is fleeting. Therefore, we have to be up and doing, moving straight towards the great Goal, attaining which one becomes supremely blessed. May Gurudev's grace enable you to keep yourself in a state of constant wakefulness and awareness. This is life—to keep yourself always upon the path and moving towards the great goal and destination!

The one way of making action harmless, taking away its power of bondage is by elevating its quality through righteousness, *dharma*. When *karma* is infilled by *dharma*, it begins to become a liberating process.

97. THE TRUTH ABOUT KARMA

We have all come here to work out our *prarabdha karma*. The *karmic* pattern decides the various experiences—physical and psychological—that each one of us has to undergo. And, there is nothing very mysterious or inevitable about this either. There is nothing inexorable, for it is our own creation. It is we who have worked for it.

Therefore, there is neither a sense of tyranny nor a sense of helplessness in this at all. We are the creators of our own present *prarabdha* even as we are the creators of our own future destiny. Either way, we are in charge. Either way, we are at the helm of affairs. Either way, we hold the key. Therefore, our position is supreme. This is to be well grasped and understood.

We are all here as a result of our *karmic* pattern, both in the broad sense of being incarnated on the earth plane and in the immediate sense of being here, now, in Sivananda Ashram. We are also all engaged in working out our *karma*. But that is not the great thing. The great thing is to know its genesis, its exact implication and its nature.

This *karma* is not imposed upon us or forced upon us. We have created it. It is our own creation, and we may nullify the *prarabdha karmic* pattern by refusing to be affected by it through using a superior philosophy, a higher understanding.

Karma has its affect upon the body, the nervous system and upon the mind and intellect—thoughts, emotions, sentiments, opinions. “But I am different from all these things. I am the great, transcendental Spirit Divine, never affected by anything. I neither need to laugh nor weep. I am all-full, I am bliss absolute. I am peace profound. I am the light shining beyond all darkness. *Karma* cannot touch me. I laugh. I am the unattached, supremely unconcerned witness of all that happens—all changing states of the body, all changing states of the mind, in all conditions.”

This is the central, secret initiation that Holy Master openly gave to one and all. This is the golden key. *Karmic* pattern works itself. Atman abides serene and unaffected because the Atman is above, beyond, unattached and untouched. Therefore, the Atman looks on as an observer. If that stand is taken, if one firmly establishes oneself in that inner centre and is what one is, then the *karmic* pattern unfolds itself. Experiences come and go, but one remains the same. This is the one thing needful.

And this period—when one is thus observing the unfolding and passing of the *karmic* pattern—also holds within itself the potential for liberation, for the experience absolute, for illumination. For this period can be filled with *abhyasa, yoga, sadhana*. It can be filled with *purushartha* (effort). It can be filled with fresh, rightly chosen and wisely executed *karma*. It is a creative period, a constructive period, a rich period. It is a period that fashions your future.

Therein lies the value of the present moment as *prarabdha karma* unfolds itself. It holds within itself the key to blessedness, the scope for unending progress. It holds within itself all the ingredients that are necessary for the ascent unto perfection. It contains, therefore, the essence of life, the essence of living—striving, attaining, achieving and becoming free.

“Know thyself and be free” was not meant to be said in vain. It was not a mouthing of words; it was not an airing of ideas. They are words of power. They are a call to perfection and liberation. They should ring in the depth of our consciousness and rouse us into wakefulness and to dynamic *purushartha*. They are living words. One who responds is indeed blessed. The Master of the Middle East said: “He who has eyes, let him see; he who has ears, let him hear. Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”

Therefore, may each one of you be blessed with this vision that you may see. May each of you be endowed with alert perceptivity that you may hear and understand, see and know. And may each one of you make your life an unceasing seeking, a constant knocking at the doors of liberation, a perpetual asking in prayer, in meditation, in contemplation with earnest and sincere aspiration. Let your whole life be a continuous asking for your birthright, your heritage. Even an earthly father will not give a stone to a son who asks for bread. The heavenly Father gives the bread of life.

A parable is not a little entertaining story. It is pregnant with immediate meaning. It is given with an intention, and it has to be received with full awareness of its important meaning. Parables have deep meaning for us, great messages for us, deep implications for us.

Thus, make your life a steady upward ascent to the Goal Supreme. This indeed is life. For this indeed are we all here. If this is grasped and lived, your highest blessedness is in the palm of your hand; the supreme attainment is assured as sure as the sun rises in the east. May it thus be understood, and may you crown yourself with glory!

98. HOW ACTION WILL NOT BIND

In the Gita Lord Krishna tells Arjuna how He is present in this universe of ours, in our lives and in the day-to-day living of our lives. “I appear before you as this world. All things are indwelt by Me.” And in the tenth chapter of the Gita, Lord Krishna mentions to Arjuna about His special presence in each category of creation. “Among trees I am such and such a tree. Among rivers I am such and such a river. Among elephants I am such and such an elephant. Among seasons I am such and such a season. Among poets I am so and so.” And, as the Lord goes on recounting His glories, He sums it up by saying: “Whatever being there is that is glorious, prosperous or powerful, know

that to be a manifestation of part of My splendour, for I am supremely transcendent and I support the world with just a part of Myself.”

And then Arjuna begins to think within himself: “What a person I was. I thought God was apart from me, far away, remote, difficult to conceive. Now I’m being told He is everywhere, in all directions, before me in this thing, in that thing.” And he is seized with a great curiosity, a great eagerness to behold in actuality what the Lord is describing. So he says to Him: “Can You actually make me see it?” The Lord replied that it was not possible with Arjuna’s physical eyes, but that He would give him a divine eye so he could behold it.

We too require a special vision. We think of God as some Being whom we have to strive at great length in order to see. But we should change our vision. We must see Him as our nearest and dearest. Though we mouth the words “You are my mother, You are my father, You are my relative and friend,” we don’t have that feeling towards Him as someone who is very close, someone very near and closely related to us.

The more we try to perceive this and begin to experience this in our feelings, in our *bhava*, the greater becomes our *yoga*, the more closely related and connected we are with Him. The *bhava* that He is not remote, not a stranger, not something far apart from us, is to be cultivated. Because, He is very near. He is our own. Maybe we are more familiar with Him than anything else.

This must be slowly realised in your heart. This feeling of your closeness to Him and His closeness to you must dawn in your heart. This feeling of your absolutely intimate relationship with Him must grow in your heart. And it is this that makes *yoga* possible. It is this that makes *yoga* fruitful. And it is this that enables you to be in *yoga* even in the midst of activity.

When you make Him close to you, familiar to you, then you can indeed be established in a close relationship with Him and at the same time act. Then action will not bind you. The world cannot bind you, for already you are bound to God in terms of intimate familiarity, closeness and love. That is the secret of abiding in God even in the midst of so-called earthly activities, for He has made clear that He is not remote and far, but indwells our world, our activities and our life on earth.

This is the secret of a permanent state of *yoga* within. He is your nearest and dearest. This is to be borne in your heart. This is to be felt every moment. Thus should your *sadhana* proceed—your intellect understanding this mystical truth, your mind ever dwelling upon this mystical truth, your heart always in awareness of this mystical truth. This is the key to success in spiritual life and attainment.

99. WORK THAT LIBERATES

Of the millions and billions of people in this world, most are engaged in work of some sort. Most are driven by the necessity to work; they have a wife, children, sick mother. Some engage in activity because they obtain great satisfaction; they are contributing something to the forward movement of the world. Still others work compulsively; their nature is full of restlessness. Some,

like Mother Teresa, work tirelessly because they are moved by the pain and suffering of others. And a rare few, like Ananda Mai Ma, are constantly on the move but with only one intent, to share their joy with others, to make all happy.

But some work as a means of spiritual evolution. They know that they need to round off their angularities, polish up their personality, eliminate defects and drawbacks, correct their errors, generate right motivation and gradually go beyond desire and selfishness by engaging in the field of practical, evolutionary *karma yoga*. In all their work, their ultimate desire and intention is only God, not self nor anything in this world. Their work does not have a direct connection with something in this world of things and enjoyment. Their work is invisibly connected with the Supreme Reality.

Their work is of a different quality. It is not worldly; it is not mundane. There is no desire behind it, but there is aspiration behind it. It is part of their evolutionary effort. It is a part of their *sadhana*. They are always alert and vigilant that imperfection may not creep into their work, that something undesirable, unspiritual, that goes in a direction contrary to the Divine, does not come into their work.

So, they are workers who seek to evolve through work. Therefore, they are also keenly self-analytical. Such work liberates because it is directed towards God, the highest goal of human existence. Such work liberates because it is not desire-driven; there is no greed behind it. Such work liberates because it is done with a spirit of adoration and worshipfulness where the presence of God is the essence of the matter. They work feeling that God is present here, now, and this is an offering to Him, another external way in which I adore Him. Thus their work is spiritualised, it is God-oriented. It is infilled with a certain knowledge and a certain *bhava*.

In addition, there are certain other activities that are unavoidable: eating to appease hunger, drinking to allay thirst, working in order to look after the stern, irreducible physical needs of the body—washing clothes, cooking, bathing. Even the sages who have realised the Self engage in these. Ramana Maharshi used to help cut vegetables in the kitchen. Gurudev attended to all manner of office work.

These are all forms of work which do not come under the category of deliberate activity or desire-driven activity. They are activities that cannot be avoided. The bound soul engages in this work; the liberated saint, sage, seer, engages in this work, because it is unavoidable. But even these are transformed into *yoga*, adoration and worship if you lift them up from the physical, material, earthly plane and place them upon a higher dimension through your *bhava*: “When I utter speech, it is Your praise, O Lord. When I move, it is perambulation around You, O Lord. When I sleep I am deeply one with You; it is *samadhi* for me, O Lord. And whatever acts I do to satisfy my senses is all adoration, for it is offered to Thee who art enshrined in my heart, O Lord.”

Thus even these unavoidable physical activities, born out of our very nature, are not allowed to go to waste, are not allowed to be unproductive or useless. Even they are converted into a creative process of adding on to your spiritual awareness and spiritual movement towards God. Such should be the ideal of the *karma yogi* and the devotee.

Those people, however, who in a state of ignorance engage in activity always have within them a corresponding psychological or mental flux. Sometimes they are elated, sometimes depressed. Sometimes they are excited, sometimes placid. Sometimes they are very annoyed or full of tension and anxiety or compulsive drives, sometimes conflicting moods and emotions. Their psyche is very much involved in an entangled, intricate manner with outer activities.

This is the antithesis of *yoga* and *karma yoga*. For they have no counterbalancing, inner psychological factor where there is a calm in the midst of the storm, where there is absolutely steady self-abidance in an inner principle notwithstanding all the activities one may engage in. Within oneself there is serenity, peace, joy, a steady abidance in the Self. Within there is an unassailable state of equanimity. Even the most hectic outer activity is not allowed to affect the inner equanimity. There is balance. One abides in peace and serenity, yet one engages in activity.

In very brief aphoristic statements, Lord Krishna advocates this type of activity: “Remember Me and do your duty.” “Engage in all activity, but abide in Me; be rooted, firmly established in Me.” “Let there be inner balance.” Thus in various places He opens our eyes to the possibility of a state where there is absolute quiescence in the midst of activity. There is no inner agitation, restlessness or excitement. Mind is under the influence of a higher inner state. There is serenity amidst activity.

This should be practised by all *sadhakas* and *yogis*, never allowing any activity to touch the inner serenity, never allowing even the most hectic, urgent activity to affect the inner abidance of the self in the Supreme Reality. This should be grasped and applied in one’s day-to-day activity. Activity may be unavoidable, but being affected by activity and falling into psychological states that are both upsetting to oneself and to others is avoidable.

“Do your duty free from inner feverishness.” Let there be *santi*, peace, coolness, an inner, unassailable serenity and equanimity. This should be the ideal. Then work becomes *yoga* and not a factor that changes your direction. Work is no work when perceived with the right perspective and vision. It is part of *bhakti*, *jnana*, *vairagya* and *yoga*. It supports them all.

May the art and science of such activity be acquired—*karma-kausalam* (skill in action). The centre point of a rapidly revolving wheel is almost stationary. We must, therefore, know that such is the nature of the work that is required if our life of *sadhana* is to move towards the Goal and yield the fruit of illumination, enlightenment and wisdom.

May we give deep thought to this subject of ourselves, our spiritual life and goal and the irreducible minimum of unavoidable work which we have to engage in. Giving deep thought, we shall benefit. Gradually we shall acquire the knowledge of how to live and work. And, in and through such a life of activity, we shall uniformly progress in our *yoga*.

God bless us all to see clearly the place of work in our life, the goal of work in our life and the way we should engage in work in our life!

100. EXPAND YOUR IDENTIFICATION TO OTHERS

May we constantly live with the awareness that our body is a moving temple of the Divine Reality. We regard our body as my body. We forget that He has an equal right to say that this body is My temple. And what we call ours is perhaps more His than ours. How easy it is to think that our body is ours! How difficult it is to keep thinking that it belongs to Him!

What is easy and what is difficult? What makes an easy thing easy and a difficult thing difficult? If we reflect upon this point, some very interesting facts arise. It is so very easy to think about ourselves. We never forget ourselves. It is so very easy to think about every minute detail of our needs, our programme, our goals, our clothes, our food. It comes so easily, so spontaneously. It seems natural. But it seems so very difficult to think about others—the needs of others, the happiness of others.

Why is it that we have to make an effort to think of others, whereas it comes so easy to think of ourselves? Perhaps it is because we do not have to make an effort to think about that with which we are fully identified. Therefore, it is natural and easy to think of the body and its needs, comforts, conveniences and every minute detail of its requirements. It spontaneously comes into the mind; it is always present in the mind. Sometimes it is difficult to put it out of the mind and think of something else. Once we know this, it becomes very easy to see why it is difficult to think of others. It is because we are not identified with others—their lives and their needs. Where there is identification, thought becomes easy and natural—spontaneous. Where there is absence of this identification it becomes very difficult.

People in the International Red Cross think of people all over the world. The moment a disaster strikes—someone is suffering—the Red Cross immediately thinks about them and rushes aid. What a miracle! How unnatural it seems! They are always alert, geared to think about others. It requires no effort because they have made that their basic aim, their objective. The very meaning of their existence is to think of others, to rush to the help of others. They have developed within themselves a capacity to identify themselves with others. They have developed this natural inclination to feel that their disaster is our disaster, that their suffering is our suffering; we have a part in it.

Perhaps the Red Cross has unconsciously solved the basic metaphysical problem of the individual soul in *samsara*, not by being philosophers or metaphysicians but by being humanitarians. Perhaps this is the key to the Vedantic declaration that we should wake up from the slumber of ignorance and give up this false identification with our little, narrow, confined, limited, temporary, false individual personality—that which is not our true Self.

Start your Vedanta, start your liberation by first being humanitarian, by first being kind and compassionate. Extend your identification and attachment to something vaster, higher, beyond. Thus the first step in breaking your bondage to this “I and mine” consciousness is to train yourself to think of others, to feel for others, to try to engage yourself in doing something that is helpful to others.

It may be that this is an indispensable interim stage. If you want to somehow or other overcome the immediate problem of the *jivatman*, and if you find it difficult to suddenly switch from the thought of yourself to the thought of the Supreme, then try to make this possible by switching your thought of yourself to your immediate nearby universe—the universe of others—of other people, creatures, insects, plants.

This is not so difficult because it is the known. It is the seen and it is immediate to you. Commence with this step. At least, if it will not take you immediately to God, it will have the helping effect of taking you out of yourself, out of your imprisonment to yourself. That is no mean achievement. That is itself a big step.

If you cannot find some way of suddenly switching from yourself to God or Brahman, then love your neighbour. Love anyone who happens to be your neighbour at that particular point in space and time. It doesn't matter that they may be a perfect stranger, yet they are your neighbour at that time. So, if you extend a helping hand, perhaps to that extent you have attained a great victory, because you have extended your "I and mineness" out of this self-centred narrow cage of flesh and bones. It is one plus point in this process of liberation. And if you go on adding these plus points to your game of life, your life may be a constant process of liberating yourself, of continuous victory over the big problem—this bondage to the "I and mine."

This is perhaps why they said: "Be good, do good. Be kind, be compassionate," and "*paropakartham idam sariram* (This body is meant for selfless service to others)." Knowing that an interim step is required to make one come out of oneself, to liberate oneself from oneself before one can enter into identification with the Supreme Being, they presented to humanity an ethical dimension, a dimension of idealism, of *dharma*, of *paropakara*, of kindness, compassion and service, of not "I", but others. How interesting to consider this evolution of human society and history and how it has become part of the evolutionary process of the individual.

Therefore, if you want to make a seemingly difficult thing easy, start becoming identified with it, start feeling that this is mine as much as any other thing. Similarly, if you feel God is mine, it will be easier to think about Him, to remember Him without forgetting Him—much more than if you think He is some Being somewhere.

Therefore, the feeling of mineness, of identification, which is our human problem metaphysically, holds within itself the key to the metaphysical solution. Gurudev said: "*Dharma* is the gateway to *moksha*. *Paropakara* is the greatest *sadhana*, the key to blessedness. There is no God-realisation without ethical perfection." May you find this key, this magic method of making difficult things easy, this magic method of liberating yourself from everything which vexes you!

101. THE FIRST STEP TO LIBERATION

The first step to liberation is to engage in the *sadhana* of selfless service unto all beings. Selfless service unto all beings is impossible where self-love is the normal state of our interior. When we love ourselves more than all other things, then our whole life will be based on this

self-love only. It is when this fact is clearly recognised that one tries to liberate oneself from the binding shackles of self-love and extends one's love to the whole world—to all of God's creation including animals, reptiles, insects and even the grass that grows under our feet.

We try to become a centre of goodwill and benefit to all. Nothing is considered to be below our attention. Everything is great because one great God has created all things large and small. Then alone the spiritual life begins, because unless self-love gives place to love of all, selfishness cannot be overcome. Unless selfishness is overcome, the process of liberating oneself from the I-dominated consciousness will not proceed. We overcome selfishness by practising its opposite in a dynamic manner.

Selflessness practised in a dynamic manner is called selfless service—with no hidden motive, wanting nothing, expecting nothing, not even recognition or thanks. As a matter of fact, they say that real selfless service should be done secretly. The one that is served should not know that he is being served. "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand is doing." This, of course, is the ideal, the height of selfless service.

It is only possible if one liberates oneself from self-love and extends one's love to all creation. And this love is impersonal. It is objectless and impersonal. It is divine, spiritual, not human, although it starts with the human dimension. It is totally motiveless, devoid of any desire. Then it can do wonders. It can completely reconstitute our interior consciousness by transforming it.

It is the expression of God through our heart, through our mind and through our vision, the way in which we view everything that God has created—looking at them through God's eye. That means looking at them with a love-filled eye. Because God and love are not to be distinguished. They are one and the same.

Therefore, love is something that goes beyond mere human sentiment or emotion. It is a part of us that does not belong to our human nature. Because our reality is not human. That part of us which is an *amsa* (part) of *paramatma* is our true identity and it is totally divine. And, inasmuch as God is an ocean of love and compassion, expressing this love in the form of acts of kindness, goodness, compassion, benefit, usefulness and servicefulness is the first step towards liberation.

102. LIBERATION IS THE ULTIMATE SIMPLICITY

The very heart and essence of the ultimate spiritual process is a unified interior. It is to set aside all complications and abide in God, abide in the Self. You ultimately reach one simple state where your heart desires nothing else except God; your mind thinks of nothing else except God—*ekagrata*. All the multifariousness is hushed and made to subside, recede and vanish, and you are left alone with God in simplicity.

Ultimately, the objective is for even yourself to quit and let God alone fill the entire consciousness. Unified consciousness is simplicity. Non-dual consciousness is God. That is

liberation. You liberate yourself once and for all from yourself—which is the root of your bondage, which is the source of all your *asanti*, peacelessness.

As long as the “I, I, I” prevails and persists, our sorrows will never end. When you succeed in silencing the “I”, bidding farewell to it, asking it to go—no longer do I require it—then the door of your heart is open and you let God in. In that instant there is peace. There is no more multifariousness, complication, confusion, distraction, miscellaneous thinking or *asanti*.

There the Divine alone is. One alone is. There prevails peace, and that peace is God. It is not an absence of noise or sound, it is a transcendence of everything, an abiding in the One and One alone, which alone is real—worlds without end, forever and ever. It ever was, ever is and ever shall be One alone. That is the ultimate simplicity. That is the supreme simplicity where there is no second to either distract you or fear.

The way to that supreme simplicity, ultimate simplicity that is God, is an entire life characterised by simplicity: simple living, simple thinking, simple feeling, a simple nature—not complicated, involved; simplicity in all aspects of your being; simplicity in all levels of your being. Children are simple. They are carefree. “Suffer little children to come unto Me, for to such belongs the Kingdom of God.”

Ego is the root and source of all complications. It is the root and source of all clash and conflict, all disharmony and discord. It is a necessary evil, but it must be kept under full control. Sri Ramakrishna put it in a simple yet very beautiful way: “Convert it into a *sattvic* ego, into a harmless ego. Let it be touched by the philosopher’s stone of devotion to God, of aspiration to realise God.” Spiritualise it and you take the harm out of it, the danger out of it. It is there because it is not possible to do away with ego altogether. But, transform it and then it becomes harmless.

It is like a snake charmer who carries a deadly poisonous cobra with him twenty-four hours a day. He catches it in his hands and shows it to onlookers. This he is able to do because he has rendered it harmless by removing its poison. It is outwardly intact; it hisses also. But he knows it cannot harm him because the poison is gone.

Therefore, the entire process of moving towards the ultimate simplicity that is God is to divest yourself of all the complications of a *tamasic* or a *rajasic* ego and remain in the *sattvic* state. “I” is there, but it is: “I am a servant of God; I am a servant of the servants of God; I live to serve. Therefore, I regard all as my masters, as my superiors. I live to give reverence to all beings, respect to all persons.”

This “I” is not a dire “I”; it is not a malefic “I”. It is not an unspiritual or undivine “I”, because it has been simplified by being rendered *sattvic*. A child also says “I”, but its “I” is like a line drawn on the surface of water. It leaves no trace because it has no ego; it has no arrogance. It is simple; it is innocent.

It is this simplicity of the inner nature that is the way, and that is dear to God. Therefore the admonition: “Be like children.” Gurudev has said in one place: “Do not be childish—flippant and frivolous. But, it is necessary to be childlike. It is the secret to attain grace and blessings.”

Thus, the more we simplify our inner and outer life, the less the distractions; we become gathered inwardly, concentrated upon God, and our interior becomes unified. This is the central process of *yoga*; it is the state needful in the interior. When you do away with all distractions, with all confused, multifarious thinking in a dozen directions, and move in one single direction only—through aspiration, through devotion, through concentration—then you come to that point of simplicity, of abiding in the One, not the many.

May this be part of your *sadhana*. May this be part of both your spiritual discipline and your ethical discipline. May this be part of your basic personal philosophy of life, both subjectively and objectively. Then you will find that all things become possible here and now. Because, ultimately, it is the simple truth that all things have to be worked out here and now.

Now is the time and this is the place where you have to liberate yourself and enter into a state of liberated consciousness. If you cannot do it here and now, you will never be able to do it, because there is no elsewhere. Wherever you are you are in yourself. It is within you that the ultimate process has to be worked out and the ultimate goal of liberation has to be entered into, experienced. This is the truth.

May God help us to see clearly this simple truth that is before us. May He give us the perception, wisdom and strength to perceive the deception and tricks of the mind, which try to take us away from this *sadhana* of simplicity by raising various imaginary notions. Beware of the mind that creates complexities where everything is, in fact, simple. Beware of the mind that tries to make things involved and thus creates confusion. It is always present. You have to be aware of it. It is not your friend. It is a trickster trying to put a spoke in your wheel, so to say.

Therefore, we have to be wakeful and alert within and refuse to be drawn away from our inherent and essential simplicity. With alertness and vigilance we will be able to maintain our essential simplicity and carry on a simple and direct relationship with the source of our being. Abide in that source!

103. DO IT BECAUSE IT'S RIGHT

In the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna uses a significant phrase, a sentence: “*kripanah phalahetavah* (Wretched are those whose motive is the reward).” He says that it is greedy and avaricious people, miserly people, who always think in terms of doing something for obtaining something. The Lord says that this is a very ignoble view, not a lofty, sublime or beautiful view.

Why should one always want to obtain something? Why not do something just because the doing of it is noble, because it is good, because it is beneficial to others, so others may obtain? Why should you always equate the usefulness of a thing in terms of what it brings to you? Why not value something in terms of what it brings to others? Why should the consideration always be linked up with “I and mine” and obtaining something for “me and myself”?

The Lord says: “This is not laudable. I cannot appreciate it. You are My children. The whole universe is yours. I am yours. What more do you want? Why don’t you realise how great you are, how fortunate you are, how blessed you are, how your life is complete in every way because I indwell you? Is there anything higher? Is there anything greater? What more is there to be obtained when you have Me? Why do you go about being burdened by such petty little thoughts: ‘What will I obtain if I do a certain thing? I do something because I want to obtain something?’”

He says: “Get rid of this view. Be noble. Be large-hearted. Do not have a constricted heart. Throw away all ideas of obtaining something for your little self, which, in any case, is false. It does not exist; it is an imagination. And, truth to tell, it is not only false and petty, it is your problem. It creates the ‘I, I, I, mine, mine, mine, for me, for me, for me.’ Don’t you know that this is your problem-creator? And yet you want to always nourish it, cherish it, safeguard it and make a big thing out of it. You are led by it, dominated by it, and orient everything by it—I, mine and what shall I get?”

Why should you lead the divine life? Because it is noble to lead it. Because it is grand and sublime to lead it. Because it is good to lead it, and because so much good comes out of it for the whole world. What does it matter if it creates some difficulties for you? If it is not so very easy or pleasant, what does it matter? It does not matter.

Therefore, this crucial thought imparted to us by Lord Krishna should be deeply considered, deeply pondered, deeply reflected upon. Why should anything bring something for you? If it is good by itself, why not do it? This ideal is echoed in a familiar saying in the West: “Virtue is its own reward.” You practise virtue, adorn your life with virtue, not because you wish to get something out of it, but because it is good to do so, it is beautiful in itself. This is indeed the right and healthy attitude one should have.

“May good thoughts come to us from all directions.” Thus an ancient *rishi* of the Vedic age addressed the great Universal Being. And he added: “So that we may become centres of good.” This is enough. Do not wish to obtain something by imbibing good or becoming good and doing good. This obtaining mentality reduces a noble, sublime thing to the level of commercialism. You do something because you want to obtain something. That is what every shopkeeper is engaged in doing. It is not a mentality that is spiritual.

“I want to have visions. I want to have ecstasy. I want to have *darsan*.” So all your *sadhana* is reduced to this level—that you do it because you want something that gives you a kick, that makes you feel specially good about yourself. Is that why you entered the spiritual life? Is that why Milarepa underwent hundreds of difficulties and problems, sufferings and tortures, and put up with all of them?

Ramakrishna used to say that it is like sowing a seed and digging it up the next day wanting to know how far it has grown, if anything has happened. Why should anything happen? Do your duty. Our approach and attitude towards our *sadhana* should be that “I am fulfilling my mission in life. I am justifying my human status. I am carrying out God’s plan for me, His will for me. He has destined me for a particular state of experience. Therefore, this itself is enough reason to engage in this type of life. No other reason is necessary.

“It is not necessary that He should give me results, give me this or that. I do it because it is the right thing to do. It is the very purpose and meaning of my existence as a human being. And if I persist in doing it, that itself is enough satisfaction for me. I have the great satisfaction of knowing that I have not wasted away or misused this great God-given gift of life. I have put it to the highest use. That is enough for me. I do not have to go on looking to see how far I have succeeded, what I have obtained. Let me make my whole life God-oriented. Let me live for the ultimate Goal. Let Him do whatever He wishes to do.”

This is the spirit of the true devotee of God. By casting away this limited and prosaic attitude of doing something for obtaining something, you liberate yourself from this petty thought; and spontaneously, with full heart, you throw yourself into this sublime task of making your life divine. Life has been given to you to thus utilise it towards this sublime consummation.

May you all shine with this large-heartedness. May you be blessed with this noble-mindedness, this noble attitude towards all that is good, all that is auspicious, all that is beautiful, all that is spiritual and sublime. If out of it much good, much gain comes to others and God’s creation, well, even that is up to Him. But you live your life because it is godly and sublime; it is the only life worth living. No other reason is required.

104. THE LIFE THAT YOU ARE MEANT TO LIVE

When a certain Christian theologian and church dignitary was asked for his personal description of Jesus, he answered: “Some call Him a great reformer among the Jews; some call Him the Son of God; some call Him the Word incarnate, but for me Jesus was a noble, sublime Being who went about doing good all His life. He was a man who moved amongst men only for doing good to them—bringing healing, happiness, consolation, inspiration and elevation.”

And strangely, if you take a look at the life of Lord Krishna, you see right from His birth until the moment of His withdrawal from His earth *lila* a most incident-filled life. He was never at repose, constantly on the move, ever amongst men, ever engaged in acts. Right from His infancy until His last moment, He was one who went about doing good, helping people, setting right what was wrong, restoring happiness to people who had lost it, ever helping, ever coming to the aid of people in so many different ways.

He was an embodiment of *paropakara*, of being good and doing good, of help, of running to the aid of the distressed at their call. This is what we find. From start to finish, His life was one of dedication, of constantly doing good, constantly helping others. Never a thought for Himself—others, others, others—so that all His life He made people happy, He left a trail of gratitude. The whole world benefited for His having been in it—rich and poor alike.

He thus shone, not only as a great divine personality but as a sublime example of a noble *mahaparopakari*. If Rama shone as an ideal human being, Krishna shone as a noble, sublime *paropakari*.

It is in this light that perhaps we could say that being endowed with human status—the power to think, to feel, to reason, to know what is noble and what is ignoble, what is sublime and what is base—if a person does not make use of this endowment and lives for oneself—selfishly, self-centred, ever thinking of oneself—the life of such a person is not life, it is living death. Whereas, a person, who while making a living and looking after oneself, is also ceaselessly engaged in the welfare of others, the happiness of others, in helping and being good to others, being useful to life around them, benefiting God’s creation, such a life is really true life. It is not a living death like the life of a selfish person, but it is a fully lived, true life.

And the life of a human being who lives for God, not only for humanity but is also ever intent upon God, living for Him, every moment breathing for Him, remembering and thinking of Him, and directing the devotion of one’s heart towards Him, such a life is not only a well-lived life, such a life has no death. Such a life merges into everlasting life. It is eternal life, divine life, a life in God where you know yourself as a part of God.

Therefore, even while you are in this body, you are living not a human life, not a worldly or earthly life, but you are one with the everlasting life of God Himself. You are part of Him. You live as That, shining with divinity, manifesting divinity through thought, word and deed, bringing that divinity into life and all its activities and movements.

Such a life should indeed be aspired for. Such a life should indeed be striven after. And such a life is life divine, life sublime. Such a life is eternal life. Such a life is a life of God on earth.

That indeed is the shining ideal held up before modern humanity by beloved Gurudev. For that is your birthright. You are meant to live such a life. Having come into this world of pain and death, this would indeed be the fulfilment of your divine mission. It is eternal life even while living in this perishable body. It is immortal life. It is a godly life. Strive for it and be blessed!

105. TO LIVE FOR GOD IS LIFE

There is no treasure greater than the treasure of the great Reality. A life that is in conscious contact with that Reality is rich in the truest sense of that term. A life that is devoid of contact with that Supreme Reality is poor, even if it is rolling in material wealth or even if it is revelling in the most admirable scholarship, intelligence and psychological acumen. “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” Thus, in these words, this telling truth has been brought home to us.

How then is the sincere seeking soul to be possessed of this treasure? How to ensure that we are not deprived of this great inner wealth of the Spirit? How to ensure that our life is not devoid of it, but is, rather, blessed by it?

The answer is that with our entire being we have to try to have It, to possess It, to cherish It, and to bless ourselves with It. Not one part of our being should be allowed to go in any contrary direction. Not one part of our being should develop a taste or a desire for anything other than That.

You should supplicate It, entreat It, ask It, pray to It, saying: “Let my entire being dwell in You. Let no part of me, even for a little while, ever, ever swerve from being totally directed towards You.”

That is why life has been given. That is why your blessed human status has been given to you, so that it may be totally offered for this one supreme task which alone makes this thing which you refer to as life worthwhile. You live when you dwell in that Being. You live when you are in a constant state of awareness of that Being. You live when you are awake and aware of the fact that you live, move and have your being in the Supreme Spirit.

“I dwell in that Supreme Spirit. That Supreme Spirit dwells within me. My life is for it. I live in order to give myself totally and entirely to that which is my very own.” To thus be consciously aware and to be consciously engaged in a total self-offering of yourself in all its completeness to that one and one alone, sole, non-dual Reality is the greatest privilege, is supreme good fortune.

There is nothing higher than this. To think of God, to ever be engaged in moving towards that Being inwardly by enquiry, discrimination, investigation and aspiration, to have an intense feeling of oneness with It—in short, to live your life in all its movements and all its manifestations only for the one single purpose and objective of being God-filled and God-directed—was the great ideal placed before us, with all the power at his command, by beloved and worshipful Holy Master Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj.

Such a life he called divine life for it is divinely oriented—dwelling in the Divine; beholding the Divine everywhere, in all things, at all times, in the midst of all activities; being filled with that divine awareness. For that is the only thing that there is. All other things are illusions and delusions, self-created hallucinations, non-existent fantasies. The one solid reality is that Being who is your all in all, your beginning, your middle and your end, your source, your support and your ultimate fulfilment.

To that end let us live. Let us lead a divine life. May Divinity fill every cell of our being, every breath that we take, each moment, each step. Let us live a life permeated and filled with Divinity, for that is the only life that there is. God is the great Reality. To live for Him is life. All other things are the contrary of life. They are shallow; they have no real worth; they have no meaning.

Let us realise this and actively move towards God with our total being every moment of our life. This indeed is supreme blessedness.

Being omnipresent and beyond time, God is always here and now at all times and all places. He is present within as well as without. This is the central truth realised by all mystics. And this truth makes one free. When this truth dawns within—through deep faith, belief and trust in the words of those who are our well-wishers—then verily one begins to live. For then one lives, moves and has one’s being in God.

Until that experience is reached, upon all the three levels—physical, mental and spiritual—one should fill oneself with all that is Divine. In all these levels, be God-filled through continuous unbroken thought of God, through continuous unbroken awareness of the truth that God

is all-pervading and eternal, that He is here and now. God is all-pervading; therefore, He is here. God is beyond time, eternal; therefore, He is now.

Holding on to this truth is being close to God in spirit. Verbally, fill yourself with Divinity by chanting His Name, speaking about Him only, praising Him, glorifying Him, praying to Him, and speaking kind words that bring joy and solace. Outwardly, cultivate the company of those who are believers, pious in devotion and seriously engaged in *sadhana*. Keep company with lofty scriptures and spiritual books. Inwardly, in your heart of hearts, cultivate compassion, kindness, truthfulness, integrity, nobility.

Thus, always fill yourself with divine things in both the outer and inner life. Lead a totally and wholly God-oriented life both within and without. That is the way to grow in Divinity, progress towards Divinity, attain experience of Divinity and ultimately be established in Divinity.

106. BEAR WITNESS TO THE TRUTH

Loving adorations to revered and beloved Holy Master Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj in whose spiritual presence we have the supreme blessedness of gathering together in an inner spiritual fellowship day by day upon our glorious journey to the realisation of Reality—which liberates us forever from this lesser existence, limited in time and space, bound within the confines of the body and mind processes!

The many find their oneness in their one non-dual Source. The many find their oneness in their one non-dual, illimitable inner support and substratum. And, the many find their oneness in the final consummation of existence when all manifested names and forms and appearances are withdrawn and dissolved and merge into the cosmic Source.

This means that oneness alone is the true fact of existence. This means that oneness alone is the truth of our seemingly separated and variegated being in this outer phenomenal earth plane. This also means that all manifestations and movements that tend to emphasise separation, difference, are contrary to this truth, contrary to this supreme cosmic fact.

We deny a great spiritual reality, a spiritual fact, a great divine truth when we see difference, feel difference and act in a way based upon this erroneous feeling of difference. Where there is a feeling of higher and lower, greater and lesser, I and you, superior and inferior, there this great cosmic truth is contradicted and there arises disharmony, discord, clash and the entire range of negative feelings and experiences, not only in the individual concerned but all around that individual. For each individual is a centre of influence that imparts something to the environment where one lives, moves and has one's being.

It is up to us, therefore, either to be unwise and become a centre of disharmony and discord or, to be wise, to be true to the great fact of our being and become what St. Francis of Assisi would have us become—a centre of understanding, consolation, sympathy, love, unity, and harmony, all that is positive and divine. What greater good fortune and glory could there be? What greater

blessedness and privilege could there be than to be a centre of all that is positive, auspicious, beautiful and blessed—in essence a centre of Divinity.

This is precisely beloved and worshipful Master's vision of life. This is precisely the ideal life that he would wish one and all of us to adopt and to live, thus affirming the truth of our being rather than contradicting it. We have come here to beautify the earth where there is enough of that which is contrary to such beauty. As we go along the highway of life on this wondrous journey towards divine perfection, liberation and illumination, we are meant to sow seeds that can flower into fragrant blossoms.

It is given to each one of us through our life to make this world a beautiful garden of God if we will but go along this way called the journey of life as sowers of seeds that will bring forth beautiful, fragrant blossoms that make the atmosphere sweet, add a joyous colour to it, and become a source of rejoicing to all those who behold it.

Let each day be to us a day of such sowing that brings forth beauty and fragrance and joy. Each thought that you allow to emanate from your mind is a seed that flowers. Each sentiment that you allow to arise in your heart is another seed that can bring about a fragrant flower if it is a feeling, a sentiment, an emotion, that is sublime, that is true to your reality.

Let the spiritual children of God, let the spiritual family of Swami Sivanandaji be indeed such a fellowship that as it goes along life's highway it sows the seeds of thoughts, feelings, sentiments and attitudes that become innumerable blossoms that will make this earth a beautiful garden of God basking fragrance everywhere. That is the beauty of life. That is the privilege of our being here, and it is indeed the true purpose of our being here—to lead a life that is truly divine, that is truly an outer expression of *satyam*, *sivam* and *sundaram*, an expression of the truth, auspiciousness and beauty that is our eternal, unchanging, essential nature.

May we grasp this supreme privilege with both our hands and rejoice in bringing about in this garden of God sweetness, fragrance, beauty, colour and joy. This indeed is the great mission in life for each and every one of us.

How easy indeed it is to choose the lesser, easier path. How difficult indeed is the choice to live Reality. How wise it is to choose the difficult, that which is auspicious, blessed and beautiful rather than to stoop low and opt for the little, the petty, the *alpa*, and thus miss this great opportunity, this golden chance—forefeit this great privilege.

Therefore, may you all be strong, wise and determined. May you shine with Divinity, express and manifest Divinity alone and thus fulfil your divine destiny. Go forward with a determination and joy in bearing witness to the divinity of the ever-present Reality. Go forward with strength and wisdom and make this life of yours a great source of blessedness and oneness, unity and harmony in this world in which you are passing through.

This indeed is the immediate task before each and every one of us. This indeed is that which imparts a grand, glorious higher meaning to our life. This indeed is that which gives a purpose that makes life worth living each moment day by day.

This is the greatest adoration that we can offer to the Divine. Live your life divinely and rejoice in this golden opportunity to make your life an adoration and offering to God and to *guru*. God bless you all!

Touchstones

In all levels where you express yourself as life, the living of life, ask yourself: “Am I living my life— physically, mentally, culturally, morally, spiritually—in a way that makes me move from the unrealities of fanciful imaginations unto the reality of actual Divinity? On all these levels, am I living, thinking, acting and moving from unrealities unto Reality, from darkness unto Light, from death and rebirth unto Immortality? In my totality, in the integrated, holistic way of living my life, am I fulfilling this great movement?” This is the touchstone.

Ask yourself constantly. As your answer to this question is, so is the quality of your life and the outcome of your life.

107. ARE YOU BECOMING A BETTER PERSON?

Spiritual perfection and divine perfection follow ethical perfection. Where there is *dharma* (righteousness) there is *adhyatma* (spirituality). Where there is true *adhyatma*, there is bound to be true *dharma*. If there is *adhyatma* and true *dharma* is lacking, then the *adhyatma* is imperfect; it is not complete.

These truths must be very clearly understood and grasped. They should be made the basis of our spiritual life. *Dharma* is the foundation, *sadhana* is the structure, *adhyatma* is the completion. Even if the structure is all complete but no roof has been put on it, no one can live in it. *Adhyatma*, therefore, is that which completes. But, both the structure of *sadhana* as well as the completing roof of *adhyatma* can only be raised upon the foundation of *dharma*.

God alone is perfect, eternally perfect. No one is perfect in this created phenomenal world, but all have the potential for perfection. And life is a means, a chance for rising beyond imperfection, of shedding one’s imperfection and gradually making the incomplete complete, of rising into a state of perfection. That is why life has been given. And *sadhana* is the method; it is the technique. *Sadhana* is the scientific system of attaining that perfection.

An unripe fruit in a garden is imperfect. It is neither sweet nor satisfying. It is hard and sour and may be bitter also. One cannot enjoy it because it is imperfect. An unripe fruit has to utilise all nature around it in order to gradually rise above its state of imperfection and become a perfect, delicious, juicy, sweet, tasty, ripe fruit which gives satisfaction and nourishment, which gives great joy to one and all—birds and beasts as well as man.

So, the whole process is a gradual transformation from imperfection to perfection, from incompleteness to completeness, from a defective human nature into a beautiful, all-perfect divine nature. And the potential for this transformation is within each human individual. God dwells in all beings, but all beings cannot become aware of His indwelling divinity. It is only given to man who can think, reason, reflect, introspect, read, listen, understand, gain knowledge and expand his understanding of himself. To this unique being alone is open the ability, the scope and the possibility of recognising this mission and engaging in purposeful, meaningful endeavour—and thus become perfect.

Therefore, one of the unfailing touchstones and one of the necessary tests of a truly spiritual life and a rightly oriented *sadhana* is: “What is my *sadhana* doing to me? What is my spiritual life doing to me?” Quite apart from its connection with God or our eternal Reality, spiritual life and *sadhana* have also to be tested upon the basis and factor of your relationship to God’s creation.

As you are proceeding in your spiritual life, are you becoming a more and more compassionate person towards God’s creatures? Are you becoming a more and more truthful person in your dealing with other persons? Are you becoming more and more a person of sublime, noble and pure thoughts, sentiments, motivations and actions? Is this taking place? Is the unripeness of an imperfect human nature gradually giving place to a maturity, to a ripeness of a spiritual nature? And is it ultimately moving towards a perfection, a divine perfection in a divine manner?

Day by day, one should test oneself upon this touchstone: “What is my *sadhana* and my spiritual life doing to me? What process is taking place within me, within my mind, my heart, my gaze, my attitude and approach to life, within the inner hidden motives behind my activity which only God, the indwelling Reality, knows and I know—perhaps.”

This is the touchstone. Are you becoming a better neighbour to your neighbour? Are you becoming a better disciple to your *guru*, a better fellow seeker to other fellow seekers? Are you becoming a positive, creative factor of inspiration and adoration in your contemporary human society? What is happening to you?

It is very, very important that you keep a tab on what is happening to you, what you are becoming. Because they say that *sadhana* is a sort of alchemy, a process of alchemy. Alchemy is that hidden, mysterious science by which base metal is turned into gold, the royal metal. And that alchemy must take place within your personality—within your thoughts and feelings, your objectives and motivations, your conduct and character. Any real, authentic *sadhana* and spiritual life, any genuine *yoga*, must inevitably, invariably bring about this inner transformation.

An orchard is valuable because fruits ripen. If there were only green and sour fruit in the orchard, no one would go near it. In the garden of spiritual living, this inner process of becoming ripe, of becoming mature, must invariably follow all *sadhana* that is rightly engaged in, all *sadhana* that is correctly oriented, all *sadhana* that is being done with an in-depth understanding of what it is supposed to do to one’s life, to one’s nature and personality.

Therefore, this touchstone is a method of testing yourself, of ascertaining the nature of your *sadhana*, whether it is going upon correct lines, whether it is being done with understanding, whether it is bringing about an inner transformation. This here and now inner transformation is as equally important as the ultimate *brahma-jnana*. I want to say it is even more important. It is a precursor to that. If it is taking place it will ultimately lead you to *brahma-jnana*, to total perfection in God-experience. If it is not taking place, you will have to wait long, because there is something blocking the needed inner transformation.

Sadhana makes a person a good person. *Sadhana* makes a person a truthful, tolerant, compassionate person. *Sadhana* creates a person of noble character, pure conduct, holy life, of sanctity in all one's activities. Thus it becomes the gradual process of the ascent of the spirit towards God-consciousness.

Imperfection is not to be kept forever. Though we may be born imperfect, it is not to be tolerated, not to be maintained. It is to be got rid of, transcended, to be made to give place to perfection. That is life. That is the meaning of life, the value of life.

Therefore, with this goal in view, one should work upon oneself upon all levels of one's being, becoming better and better, day by day, until one becomes godly, divine, full and totally perfect. This, indeed, is each one's responsibility, each one's mission in life, each one's great duty.

108. IS THE GOD-NATURE GROWING IN YOU?

There is a perfection within the individual soul that is referred to variously by various traditions. *Ishvara amsa*, a part of God, some call It. Others say the Light of lights beyond all darkness. The Old Testament says that God created man in His image; therefore, there is in man the likeness of God; He created Adam and breathed His spirit into him. And the Islamic tradition says that man has been created with the light of God within.

Therefore, there shines within you a spark of Divinity, something that is radiant in the midst of the darkness of *avidya* or *ajnana* or ignorance. There, in that centre of your being there is no darkness. There cannot be any darkness. It is always effulgent.

It is the development of that Light within you so that your whole being becomes filled with light that is called the science of *yoga*. It is this which is called the spiritual process. It is this which is called Vedanta—to realise that: "I am the Light. I am not the other things that cover the Light. I am That which shines in the centre."

When a kerosene hurricane lamp is lit, the lamp frame is not the light, nor is the kerosene, nor the glass chimney, nor the wick. In the centre of all this there is that principle which makes a lamp a lamp, without which a lamp is not a lamp. That which gives light, which banishes darkness, that alone is light. All other factors may be necessary for that light to shine, but all of them are useless unless the flame burns within and the light radiates.

Therefore, the Light within is central to the life of the human being. Without it life is no life. And the more you grow into that God-nature, the more it becomes awakened, unfolded, infills you, becomes active within you, the more you are progressing in the spiritual life, the more you are ascending towards the ultimate experience. *That is the touchstone.*

What is man's concept of the God-nature? There is a picturesque verse in Hindi which asks: "What is the difference between the softest thing known to man and a saint?" The softest thing known to man is butter. It is so soft, so vulnerable, that with a little heat it becomes softer still and starts to melt. But then, the verse picturesquely says: "Softer than butter is the heart of a saintly spiritual person, because his heart melts not when he is being afflicted with heat but when he sees others being afflicted by heat." When others are afflicted by heat he cannot bear it. That is the difference.

Therefore, Lord Krishna tells Arjuna that one who considers the sorrow of others as his own sorrow, the pains of others as his own pain, the sufferings of others as his own suffering, is very dear to the Lord. Such a person is always engaged in trying to relieve the sufferings of all beings, all creation. It is not a deliberate act. He feels an innate identity everywhere with all things. His whole attitude towards others is to treat others as himself.

Why is this so? Because the God-nature is active, awakened in that being. For, the ultimate concept of God in man's mind and heart is that God is infinite compassion, a source of mercy. He is all-merciful. A poet says that even if an individual has done a single act of kindness, then the great Cosmic Heart will forget about a hundred thousand errors and sins and only harbour in Its heart that one act of kindness.

So this is God in the concept of man—an ocean of compassion and infinite mercy. And man is made in the image of God. Therefore, compassion and mercy are inherent in us. And the more we activate it—the more we exercise it, the more we manifest it, the more we grow in our real nature, our God-nature—the nearer we approach His experience. Ultimately, we enter into that experience when we become filled with the God-nature.

Thus, within man there is this potential for infinite goodness, love, kindness, compassion and mercy precisely because inherently we are that which is the infinite, inexhaustible ocean of these things.

Therefore, that being our essential nature, the development of that essential nature would consequently mean growing in kindness, compassion and mercy. That is spiritual life. That is a touchstone of spiritual progress. That is the ascent into the God-nature which is the central part of our being, our *nija svarupa*. For we are part of God; we are made in His likeness; we have within us what He is.

Thus indeed should man live on earth like a God, ever ready to run to the succour of those who are in distress, to relieve the suffering of those who are suffering. This is the quintessence of the simple prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. Be an angel of mercy. The compassionate are never forgotten in human memory. Florence Nightingale is even now remembered. Father Damien is

even now remembered. All the great ones in the scriptures who exercised compassion are ever remembered. They are immortal.

This is Divinity being manifest through the human nature upon this earth plane. That is your grand privilege. That is your grand good fortune—to act like God, live like God and be a God on earth, be a source of solace. Will you not exercise this supreme privilege, this supreme good fortune and shine with Divinity? What greater grace can there be, what greater good fortune, greater honour and privilege can there be than to live in this earth plane like a God on earth?

That indeed should be grasped, and, while on earth, we should live here as the Gods that we are, as the parts of Divinity that we are. That indeed would be a life that is worth living. That life would have been well lived, and we would have put God's great gift to its highest use and made ourselves forever blessed. This then is the task! This then is the great life, the ideal!

Glossary

- abhiman(a)*: egoism, identification with the body
abhyasa: repetition, practice
abhisheka: holy bath
acharya: preceptor
ades(a): spiritual instruction, divine command
adhikari: qualified person
adhyasa: superimposition or false attribution of properties of one thing on another thing
adhyatma: spirituality
advaita: non-dual
advaita Vedanta: non-dualistic philosophy
aham: I
ahamkara: egoism
ahimsa: non-injury in thought, word and deed
ajna: order
ajnana: spiritual ignorance
amala: without impurity
amritasya putrah: children of Immortality
amsa: part
ananda: bliss, happiness, joy
ananya: where there is no other
anasakti: non-attachment, dispassion
anatma(n): non-Self, insentient
anga: limb
anitya: non-eternal, impermanent, evanescent
annamaya kosa: gross body
antahkarana: inner instrument, organ, being, fourfold mind: mind, intellect, ego and subconscious mind
antaratma: the Indweller
antarmukhi pratyahara: introspection, gaze turned inwards, withdrawal of the mind
apara vidya: lower knowledge, intellectual knowledge
aparoksha'nubhuti: direct, actual experience
apramatta: careful, watchful, vigilant
apurna: imperfect, not-full, incomplete
arati: waving of light before the Lord
aradhana: worship of God, adoration
artha: an object of desire, wealth
asana: posture, seat
asanti: restlessness, absence of peace of mind, distraction
asat: that which is not, non-existent, unreal
asatya: untruth
ashram: hermitage
ashtanga yoga: the eight-limbed Raja Yoga of Maharshi Patanjali
asuddha: impure

- asura*: demon, evil tendency in man
asuri sampada: demoniacal qualities
 Atma(n): the Self
atma-jnana: knowledge of the Self
atma-nivedanam: total self-surrender
atma'nubhava: experience of the Self
atma-svarupa: the essential nature of the Self
atmaupamya: likeness of the Self
avarana: a covering, veil of ignorance
avastha: state
avatara: incarnation
avichara: lack of enquiry
avidya: ignorance, nescience
avinasi: indestructible
aviveka: lack of discrimination
bandhana: binding
bandhas: a class of *hatha yoga* exercises
 Bhagavan: the Lord
 Bhagavad Gita: 700 verses from the great Hindu epic Mahabharata recording the discourse between Lord Krishna and Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, prior to the commencement of the great war and giving in clear and concise form the highest teachings and truths
bhajan: devotional singing, worship, praise of the Lord
bhakta: devotee
bhakti: devotion, love of God
bhaktisvarupa: essence of devotion
bhakti yoga: path of devotion
bhav(a): mental attitude, feeling, purity of thought
bhava roga: disease of transmigration
bhoga: enjoyment
bhranti: delusion
bhumi: plane, land
bodhi: enlightenment
 Brahman: the Absolute Reality, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute, it is not only all-powerful but all-power itself, it is not only all-knowing and blissful but all-knowledge and bliss itself
brahmacharya: purity, celibacy
brahma-jnana: direct knowledge of Brahman
brahmakara vritti: thought of Brahman alone
brahmamuhurta: the period of an hour and a half before sunrise
brahmatva: the principle of Brahman
brahma-vidya: science of Brahman, knowledge of Brahman, learning pertaining to Brahman or the Absolute Reality
buddhi: the discriminating faculty, intellect, understanding
buddha: one who is awakened
chaitanya: the consciousness that knows itself and knows others; Absolute Consciousness

chanchalatva: restlessness
chintan(a): thinking, reflecting
chit: absolute consciousness or intelligence
chitta: subconscious mind
daivi: divine
daivi sampad: divine wealth, divine qualities
dakshata: expertise
dama: control of senses
dan(a): charity, giving
darsan: vision, making visible, sight
daya: compassion, mercy
dehadhyasa: identification with the body
dharana: concentration
dharma: righteous way of living as enjoined by the sacred scriptures, virtue
dhyana: meditation
divya: divine
duhkha: sorrow, pain, misery, grief
durbuddhi: evil mind
dvaita: dualism
dvandvas: pairs of opposites such as heat and cold, pleasure and pain, etc.
eka: one
ekagrata: one-pointedness of mind: concentration
ekameva'dvitiyam: One alone, without a second, Brahman
Gayatri: one of the most sacred Vedic *mantras*
Gita: see the Bhagavad Gita
Gopis: milkmaids
grihastha: householder
grahanasilata: willingness and readiness to receive
gudhah: hidden
guna: quality born of Nature: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*
gunatita: beyond the three *gunas*
guru: teacher, spiritual preceptor
guru kripa: preceptor's grace or blessings
guru stotra: hymn to the Guru
gurutva: nature of the *guru*
hatha yoga: a system of Yoga for gaining control over the physical body and vital energy
hatha yogi: one who practices *hatha yoga*
iccha: desire
ishta devata: chosen Deity
ishta mantra: *mantra* of one's chosen Deity
isvaramaya: God-filled
isvarapranidhana: devotion to the Lord
jada: inert, insentient, non-intelligent
jagat: world, changing
janma: birth
jara: old age

GLOSSARY

japa: repetition of the Lord's Name, repetition of a *mantra*
jagrat: wakeful condition
jijnasa: desire to know
jijnasu: one who aspires after knowledge, spiritual aspirant
jiva: individual soul with ego
jiva-karunya: compassion towards creatures
jivan-mukti: liberated in this life while still living
jivatma(n): individual soul
jivatva: individuality
jnana: knowledge, wisdom of the Reality or Brahman
 jyoti: light
kaivalya samrajya: kingdom of final liberation
kali purusha: spirit of the Iron Age
kama: desire, passion, lust, legitimate desires
karma: actions operating through the law of cause and effect
karma-phala-bhoga: enjoyment of fruit of actions
karma yoga: the *yoga* of selfless service
karma yogi: one who practises *karma yoga*
kartritva: sense of doership
kartritva abhimana: pride of doership
karuna: compassion
kasmalam: dejection
kirtan: singing the name and glory of God
kosa: sheath
kripa: grace, mercy, blessing
kriya: physical action, *hatha yoga* exercise
krodha: anger
kshetra: field, holy place, physical body in the philosophical sense
kundalini: the primordial cosmic energy located in the individual
kutastha atma svarupa: changeless nature of the Self
lakshya: goal
linga: symbol, sign
lobha: greed
loka: world of names and forms
mada: pride
mahapurusha: a great person, a great soul, a sage, the Supreme Lord
mahatma: great soul, saint, sage
mahavakya: great sentence
mala: impurity
mama: mine
manana: reflection, constant thinking, meditation on the eternal verities
manava: man
mantra: sacred syllable or word or set of words through the repetition and reflection of which one attains perfection or realisation of the Self
marga: path
matsarya: jealousy

maya: the illusory power of Brahman, the veiling and projecting power
mithya: unreal, false, illusory
moha: delusion caused by wrong thinking, false identification and deluded attachment
moksha: liberation, Absolute Experience
mrityu: death
mudras: a certain class of exercises in *hatha yoga*, symbols shown with hands during worship
mumukshu: one who aspires after *moksha* or liberation
mumukshutva: intense aspiration for liberation
murti: idol
nada: primal mystic sound or first vibration from which all creation has emanated, the first manifestation of the unmanifested Absolute, Omkara or Sabda-Brahman
nam(a): Name
nam(a) sankirtan: singing of the Lord's Name
nami: the named
navavidha bhakti: nine modes of devotion
nididhyasana: profound and deep meditation
nija svarupa: one's own true nature
nirabhimana: without ego
nirakara: formless
niranjana: spotless
nirdvandva: beyond the pairs of opposites
nirguna: without attribute
nirmala: purity
nirvana: liberation; final emancipation
nirvikalpa samadhi: state of superconsciousness without modification of the mind
nishkam(a): without desire
nishkam(a)-karma-yoga: selfless service
nishtha: steadfastness, establishment in a certain state
nitya: eternal, permanent
nivritti: renunciation, stepping back from worldly activity
niyama: observances, the second step in *raja yoga*
padmasana: the lotus pose, a meditative posture
parabrahman: the Supreme Absolute, the transcendental Reality
paramananda: supreme bliss
paramatma(n): the Supreme Self
Para-Sakti: the Supreme Power or Energy
para vidya: higher knowledge, direct knowledge of Brahman
paripurna: all-full
paropakara: selfless service
prajnana: awareness, consciousness
prajnanam brahma: Consciousness is Brahman
prakriti: Nature, causal matter
pramada: heedlessness
prana: vital energy, life-force, life-breath
prana sakti: subtle vital power arising from the conservation of *prana*
pranava: the sacred monosyllable "OM"

- pranayama*: regulation and restraint of breath
prapancha: worldly life
prapta: attained
prarabdha karma: the portion of *karma* that determines one's present life
pratikam: image
prasad: food dedicated to a deity during worship and then eaten by devotees as something sacred
pratyahara: abstraction or withdrawal of the senses from their objects
pratyaksha devata: visible God
prem(a): divine love
premi: lover
priya: pleasant
preyo marga: path leading to the pleasant
puja: worship, adoration
pundit: scholar, learned man
Puranas: Hindu scriptures, eighteen in number, containing the whole body of Hindu mythology
purascharana: an observance consisting of the repetition of a *mantra* as many hundred thousand times as there are syllables (letters) in the *mantra*, concluding with fire worship, libations of water and feeding the poor
purusha: the Supreme Being, the Self which abides in the heart of all things
purushartha: human effort, individual exertion
rajas, rajo guna: one of the three aspects of cosmic energy, the principle of dynamism in Nature bringing about all change, activity, passion, restlessness
raja yoga: the royal *yoga* of meditation; the system of *yoga* generally taken to be the one propounded by Patanjali Maharshi
raja yogi: one who practises *raja yoga*
rishi: sage; seer of truth
rudri: a particular group of *mantras* in the Veda
rupa: form, appearance
sabda: sound, word, *omkara* (OM)
sad-guru: a Guru of Self-realisation
sadhak(a): spiritual aspirant
sadhana: spiritual practice
sadhana chatustaya: fourfold means of liberation: discrimination, dispassion, sixfold virtues and burning desire for liberation
sadhu: a pious or righteous person, a *sannyasin*
sad-vichar(a): right enquiry, enquiry into Truth
sadyo-mukti: instant liberation
saguna: with attributes or qualities
sahaja: natural, true, native
sahaja avastha: natural state, superconscious state that has become natural and continuous
sakshatkara: direct realisation, experience of Absoluteness
sakshi: witnessing principle, witness
sakti: power, energy, force, the Divine Power of becoming, the dynamic aspect of Eternal Being, the Absolute Power or cosmic energy
sakti-pat: descent of power through *upasana*

sama: control of mind, tranquillity
samadhi: the state of superconsciousness where Absoluteness is experienced, attended with all-knowledge and joy, Oneness
samadhisthana: the place of interment of a holy man
samatva: evenness of mind, equanimity
samsara: life through repeated births and deaths, the process of worldly life
samsari: one who is impelled by desire, attachment, craving
samskara: mental impression, subconscious tendency
samparka: contact
samyam(a): perfect restraint, an all-complete condition of balance and repose, concentration, meditation and *samadhi*
samyoga: contact
sankalpas: imaginations
sanketa matra: indicators
sankirtan: same as *kirtan*
santi(h): peace
santi path: peace chant
santosh(a): contentment, joy, happiness
sannyasi(n): a monk, one who has embraced the life of complete renunciation
sarvangasana: shoulder stand of the *hatha yogins*
sastra: scripture, words of authority
sat: Existence Absolute, Being, Reality, Truth
satchidananda: Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute
satta: Reality
satori: enlightenment
satsang(a): association with the wise (good)
satsangis: those who attend *satsanga*
satsankalpa: true resolve, pure desire, perfect will
sattva: light, purity, reality
sattvic:
sat-vidya: science of Reality
satya(m): truth
seva: service
shadripu: six enemies—lust, anger, greed, delusion jealousy, pride
shat sampat: sixfold virtues
siddhasana: a meditative pose
siddhanta: established tenet or doctrine
siddha: realised; perfected; a perfected yogi
siddhi: psychic power, perfection
sirasasana: the headstand of *hatha yogins*
sishya: disciple
sivam: all that is auspicious
shloka: verse
smriti: code of law
sparsa: touch
sraddha: faith

- sravana*: listening to the scriptures
sreyas: good
sreyo marga: path leading to the good
sruti: the Vedas
stotra: hymn
subha: auspicious, blessed
subheccha: good desire
suddha: pure, clear, clean, untainted
sukha: happiness, pleasure, joy
sukhasana: a meditative pose
sundaram: beautiful
surya-namaskar: offering worship to the Sun by throwing oneself down on the ground quite prostrate and flat with eight limbs touching the ground
sushka: dry, empty
sutra: a terse sentence, aphorism
svabhava: one's own nature or potentiality, innate nature
svadharma: one's own prescribed duty in life according to the eternal law
svadhyaya: study of scriptures
svarupa: essence, essential nature, the essential nature of the Self, Reality, *satchidananda*, true nature of Being
Swami: a Hindu monk
tamas, tamo guna: ignorance, inertia, darkness
tapas(ya): asceticism
tapasvi(n): ascetic, one who is practising *tapas*
tapa-traya: threefold afflictions
tat sat: That, the Absolute Existence
tattva: reality, element, truth, essence, principle
tyaga: renunciation
upades(a): spiritual instruction
upadhis: limiting adjuncts or additions, superimposition that gives a limited view of the Absolute and makes It appear as the relative
Upanishads: knowledge portion of the Vedas, texts dealing with the ultimate Truth and Its realisation. 108 Upanishads are regarded as important ones of which ten are regarded as most important
upasana: worship, devout meditation
vairagya: dispassion, indifference towards sensual objects and enjoyments born as a result of spiritual discrimination
vasana: subtle desire, a tendency created in a person by the doing of an action or by enjoyment
Vedanta: the end of the Vedas (lit.), the Upanishads
Veda: the most ancient authentic scripture of the Hindus, a revealed scripture and therefore free from imperfections
vichar(a): enquiry into the nature of the Self, Brahman, Truth Absolute
vidya: knowledge, also meditation and worship (*upasana*)
vikalpas: doubts
vikshepa: tossing of the mind
vimala: pure

vinamra: humble

viparita jnana: wrong knowledge

vismriti: forgetfulness

visvas(a): faith

visvatma: universal Soul

vivek(a): discrimination between the Real and the unreal

vritti: thought, thought wave, mental modification

vyavahara: worldly activity, relative activity as opposed to spiritual

yajna: sacrifice

yama(s): restraint, vow, the first step in *raja yoga*

yoga: union (lit.), abstract meditation or union with the Supreme Being, unruffled state of mind

under all conditions, *yoga* is mainly of four types: *karma*, *bhakti*, *raja* and *jnana*

yogi(n): one who practises *yoga*